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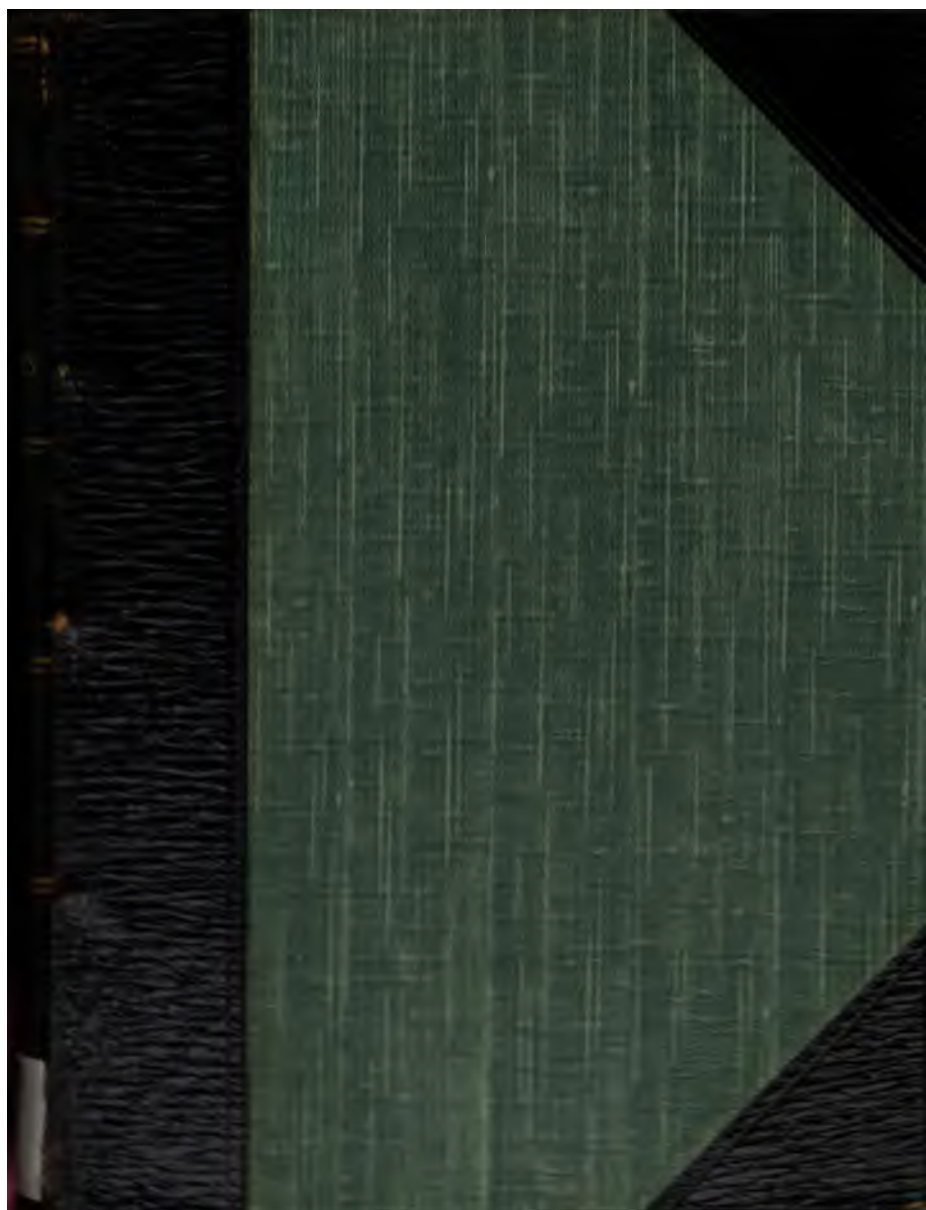
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THE HINDERERS

A STORY OF THE PRESENT TIME

BY

EDNA LYALL

AUTHOR OF

"WE TWO," "WAYFARING MEN," "IN SPITE OF ALL," ETC.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1902.

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“To-day the hope of progress at home and tranquillity abroad lies in the recognition, in theory and practice, of the supreme claim of the moral ideal, not less in our dealings with our own dependencies and with other nations than in the social transformation through which England must pass in her progress towards a healthier and happier life.”

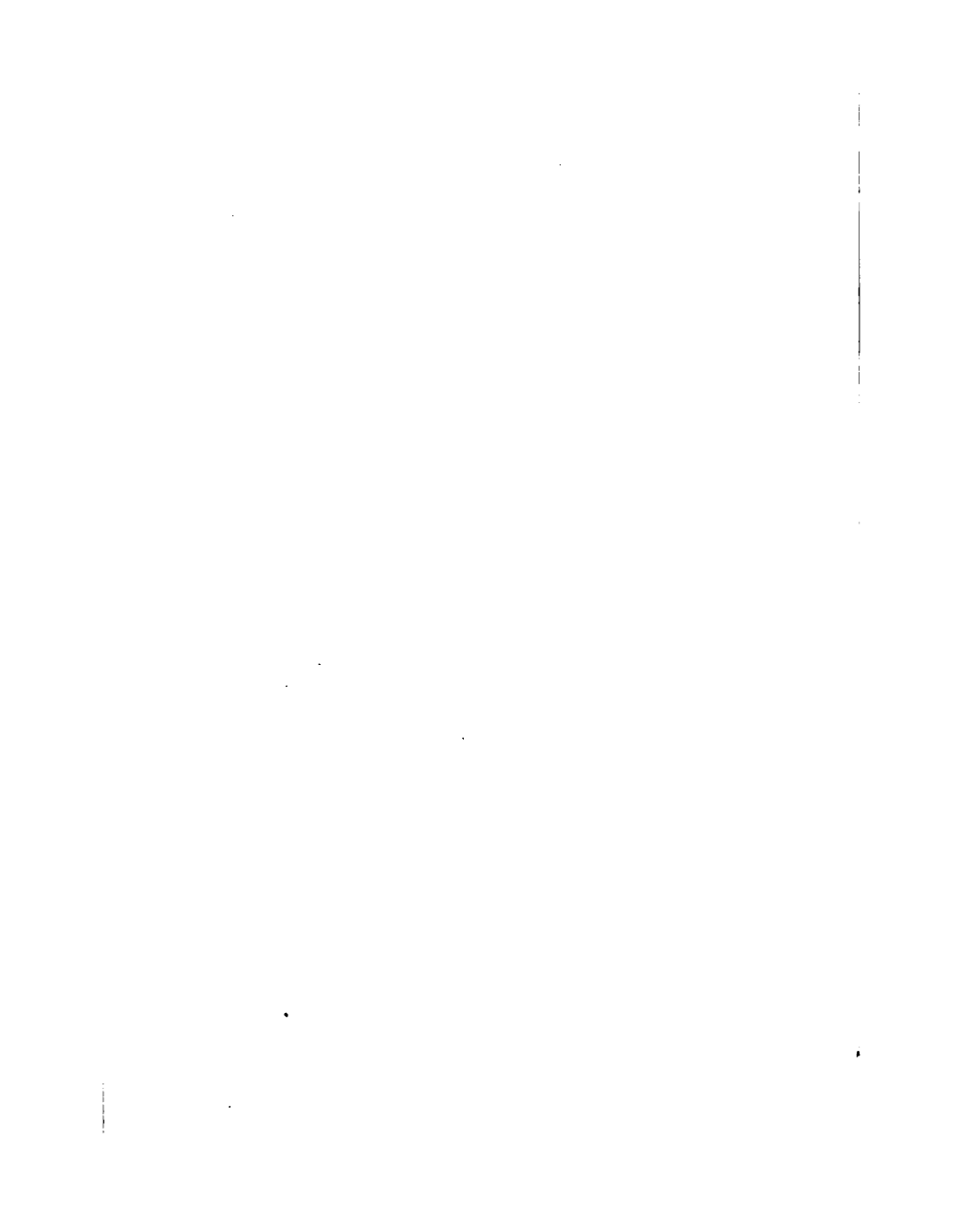
G. P. GOOCH: *The Heart of the Empire.*

DEDICATED TO

E. D. BRADBY

(Secretary of the Boer Women and Children Clothing Fund).

"Peace is more strong than war,—and gentleness,
Where force were vain, makes conquest o'er the
wave;
And love lives on and hath a power to bless,
When they who loved are hidden in the grave."
LOWELL.



CHAPTER I.




THE HINDERERS.

"Sorrow is no time of mere loss or bewilderment or inactivity. It is the call to come up higher. . . . It is the gate into the deeper and wider domain, where Spirit and Reason and Imagination may, by bravely facing their affliction, win their freedom, and see into the mystery of God."

CANON SCOTT HOLLAND.

"My compliments to Mrs. Moulton, and I should be glad to hear whether the Governor and Miss de St. Croix are likely to return soon," said Lieutenant Warren, giving his card to the dark-skinned servant who stood, salver in hand, and deferentially received it.



“Unlucky their being out. I should like to see them again,” mused the young Englishman, glancing with keen appreciation round the room into which he had been ushered, a homelike room, with treasures of art, and old well-bound books, and many tokens of womanly occupation. “I wonder whether Irene is as little altered as the place. No, that’s impossible—why it’s seven years since we saw each other. She was standing there, I remember, by the piano, when she told me that she could never leave her grandfather, that she was the only one left to care for him, and that marriage was out of the question for her. Brave little girl! She carried it off with a smile, but I knew well enough that she cared. I’m glad I told Maud all about it; we have both of us good cause to bless her for devoting herself to her grandfather.”

His reflections were checked by the entrance of a grey-haired, gentle-eyed lady, who greeted him pleasantly.

"You have not forgotten me, then?" he said, well pleased.

"No, indeed," said Mrs. Moulton, sitting down by the open window. "Sir George was talking of you only yesterday, when we heard that your ship had come into port. We lead such a quiet life here in Espaniere, that you hardly understand what an event the arrival of a warship is."

"I remember in old times that there was always a ball in the Assembly Rooms," said Frank Warren, "and that the pretty Creoles were most perfect dancers. I am very sorry to hear of the Governor's illness. Has it lasted long?"

"He had a stroke of paralysis fifteen months

ago, and though partially recovering has never been able to do anything since. My husband is able to act for him, but Sir George will send in his resignation unless his health improves by Easter."

"He must be a great age."

"He kept his eightieth birthday a week ago, and, to tell the truth, even the little excitement of the celebration which the Islanders got up in his honour did him harm."

"He was a dear old fellow, and I remember how popular he always seemed to be," said Frank Warren. "A gentleman of the old school."

"Yes," said Mrs. Moulton. "He always seems to me a fine old English gentleman, yet with just that little touch of readiness to appreciate other nationalities which one so often misses in our countrymen."

"They told me Miss de St. Croix is out driving with him. I am sorry not to have seen her."

"They drive out every day, but no doubt they will be home again very soon," said Mrs. Moulton. She was the only person who knew of that episode in the past when the young Lieutenant had asked the Governor's granddaughter to be his wife, and she wondered now whether it would be well that they should meet. Irene had talked very composedly of his marriage when they had seen the notice four years ago in the papers, but Mrs. Moulton understood well enough how excellent an actress a woman can become under such circumstances, and she knew that at nineteen Irene's resolve to refuse the Lieutenant, and to stay at Espaniere to play her *rôle* of Governor's lady and cheer her grandfather's old age, had cost the girl keen suffering.

She glanced at Frank Warren's honest sun-burnt face, and she remembered that Irene was no weak sentimental girl, but a woman who had again and again given evidence of courage and high-mindedness. "They had better meet," she reflected, "no harm could come of it;" and while she was talking to the Lieutenant about his wife she heard the sound of wheels as a carriage approached the house.

Mrs. Moulton was one of those excellent listeners who always receive confidences. In that brief talk Frank Warren had opened his heart to her and she had learnt much about his wife, his future prospects, and his hopes of a land appointment when the home which was at present only a dream might become a reality.

"Why, there they are!" exclaimed the young man irrelevantly. He hastily moved towards

the window, from which could be seen a sad little procession—the aged Governor feebly totttering across the lawn, supported on one side by his Hindoo servant and on the other by a slim figure in white, while a little Indian page brought up the rear with an armful of cushions.

“I thought they would soon be here,” said Mrs. Moulton. “As soon as they have established Sir George in the summer-house I will go and let them know of your arrival.”

Frank Warren watched the graceful white-robed figure, and the gleam of light-brown hair touched into burnished gold by the sun; then Irene disappeared behind the hedge of poinsettia ablaze with its scarlet trophies, and with a sigh he turned to Mrs. Moulton.

“What an anxious life it must be for her!” he said. “There was something almost motherly

in her air as she supported that poor old man."

"There is something motherly in all good women," said Mrs. Moulton quietly. It may be an anxious life, but she makes it a very happy one. Now I will go and see whether the Governor is well enough to enjoy a chat with you."

Taking up a large white sunshade lined with green, she crossed the lovely tropical garden with its wealth of palms, orange-trees, bamboos, and rare pines, until at the head of a beautiful little glen she came to the summer-house, in which the invalid had just been ensconced on a wicker lounge.

He was a fine old man; his white hair, trim white beard, and rather shaggy eyebrows would alone have made him noticeable, even had it not been for the nobility of the features and expres-

sion, rendered pathetic yet not marred by the pallor and the fragile look which told of long suffering.

Irene was standing beside him fanning him with a large grass fan dipped in water, which made a faint fragrance not unlike sandalwood. She, too, had the same noble, open-looking face: her fair complexion, rendered unnaturally white by the climate, only added to the spiritual look in the very dark blue-grey eyes; while the thick masses of golden-brown hair overshadowed her wide forehead and were coiled high on her shapely well-poised head.

"Grandfather is tired with his drive, but we got a nice little breeze on the mountain road," she said, greeting her old friend and chaperon with a smile. "Fetch the lemonade, Sambo, at once," she added, turning to the little page.

"I came to see whether Sir George would care to speak to Lieutenant Warren, who has just called," said Mrs. Moulton.

"What! Frank Warren? My old Vicar's grandson? Eh! to be sure. Go and bring him out here, Irene. He was in Espaniere two or three years ago, and played lawn-tennis with us, I remember. A fine young fellow, and like my old friend in Devonshire."

"Suppose you have your lemonade before you see him, Granfer dear. And I will go in and make all the proper inquiries about his kith and kin. It is seven years since he was here, and don't you recollect hearing of his marriage in the Diamond Jubilee time?"

"I had forgotten—I forget everything nowadays," said the Governor, with a sigh. "I wonder whether he has brought later news of Her Majesty."

"I will bring him to see you," said Irene, putting down the fan, "and Mrs. Moulton will prevent you from doing anything rash while I am away."

"She thinks I shall not leave her any lemonade," said the Governor, patting her shoulder. "Grudges her poor old grandsire a good drink when his throat is as dry as a lime-kiln. A very cruel girl—I could a tale unfold to the Lieutenant."

She laughed gaily as she stooped to kiss his white head, then, plucking a bit of pink hibiscus from a great shrub near the wide doorway, left the summer-house and walked slowly across the lawn.

"There is one tale, happily, that he can't unfold, and need never know," she reflected. "Dear Granfer! thank God I chose to stay with you!"

Her life had been so resolutely devoted to the duty which was nearest, that the grief of her girlhood, though it had left its mark on her, had proved a blessing, not a curse.

Her wholesome mind would not allow itself to brood over dreams of the might-have-been, yet inevitably a little tremor of nervousness ran through her as she walked under the broad verandah and approached the open window of the drawing-room.

"My grandfather will be pleased to see you," she said, greeting the Lieutenant with the genial hospitality for which Government House was noted, and at once setting him at his ease.

"I was grieved to hear about his illness," said Frank Warren. "I fear you have had a hard time nursing him."

"Oh! no," she replied, leaning back in the

big wicker-chair opposite him. "The first week, when we were in great anxiety, was hard; but directly there was real hope of his recovering I enjoyed the nursing. You know I believe there is a touch of selfishness about it, for I do like to feel that he will be patient and happy with me when other people can't please him. There's a lot of the old Adam or Eve in all of us."

"More of the 'ministering angel' in you, I think," said Frank Warren, looking at the sweet face.

"You are much too old a friend to pay compliments," said Irene, laughing. "But you shall be forgiven because in Government House a quotation from Sir Walter is always welcome. Nothing irritates my grandfather more than the people who extol Swinburne, and try to convert him to their way of thinking. We will

go out to him in the garden as soon as he has rested for a minute or two. I hope Mrs. Warren is well."

"Very well; I heard only to-day from her. I do hope when you are in England you will see something of her. Mrs. Moulton tells me there is a possibility that Sir George will resign in three months' time."

"Yes, I think it is almost a certainty," said Irene, playing with the sprig of pink hibiscus, "and then I suppose we should settle somewhere in the South of England—Torquay or Bournemouth, perhaps—but all the places are mere names to me."

"I forgot you had never been there," said Frank Warren, whose varied life soon blotted from his memory the histories of his friends.

"Well, my mother kept me with her here till I was twelve, and then for six years I went for

education to Switzerland. She meant to give me a summer in England, but her illness and death changed all plans and I came straight back to Espaniere. We shall be only too glad to meet Mrs. Warren."

"She is very lonely," he said. "London lodgings are not cheerful, especially in the winter. How she would revel in this lovely place! Those large blue and green butterflies would delight her. But the tropics wouldn't do for the little one, and she is Maud's chief pleasure now. She has sent me the child's photograph."

"A good one?"

"Capital, and not bad of herself. May I show it you?"

And the very last remnant of the old dream fled as Irene met the eyes of the little wife in the photograph.

"It's like a Madonna and child," she said, looking intently at the picture.

"That's just what I think," he said, and they wandered out together into the garden, talking of the subject that was evidently nearest to his heart, in a way that afterwards made him wonder, and propound a new theory to himself that women might be divided into two classes, the motherly and the coquettish, his wife and Irene belonging to the first order.

It was a shock to the kind-hearted sailor to see how sad a change had come over old Sir George; yet he could not help admiring the brave way in which the gallant old man tried to show him all hospitality, and to bring back to mind the friends and scenes dear to him long ago in England.

"Yes, I was at school with your grandfather in the rough old times, when boys got their

training under conditions which would have shocked modern parents," said the Governor, clearly enjoying that backward glance which is often a solace to old age.

"I know you used to keep my grandfather from being bullied for wearing a great-coat," said Frank Warren, laughing. "He was a delicate sort of chap, and the doctor insisted on the coat, and the fellows used to rag him for it."

"Did they? I'd forgotten all about it. But I remember a hateful green jacket that I had to wear myself when no other boy in the school had such a garment, and how I used to rub my elbows on the desk to make the thing wear out."

"And now it is the most difficult thing to coax you to give up an old unfashionable coat," said Irene gaily.

"For the very good reason that the old man

shrinks and his coat grows easy, while the boy grows and his coat waxes tight; and now we are talking of such matters it would be just as well that you should give us Béranger's song, 'Mon Habit.'"

Sambo the page had in the meanwhile handed cooling drinks and macaroons to the little group in the summer-house, and Irene, after showing off the tricks of her favourite fox terrier, "Dan Leno," took her guitar from its case and began to tune it, then sang in a mezzo-soprano voice, sweet though not strong, the beautiful little French air to which Gounod has set Béranger's poem.

There was a minute's silence when she ended; the mournful sweetness of "*Ne nous séparons pas*" seemed to echo through the shady retreat, and old Sir George looked peacefully down the lovely wooded glen and

between the great branches of a giant Ceiba-tree to the blue mountains in the distance. Suddenly a troubled frown was visible on the kindly old face. He turned quickly to the visitor.

"Did you hear in the town if any fresh telegram had been received as to Her Majesty?"

"There was nothing fresh, sir," said Frank Warren. "But from the last telegram it can clearly only be a question of days."

"This accursed war has hastened the end of the best and most tender-hearted Queen the world has ever known," said Sir George, the colour mounting in his pallid face.

"Were you then against the——" began the Lieutenant, but at a warning glance from his hostess he broke off and she promptly turned the conversation.

"I shall always be glad to have once seen the Queen's smile," she said, talking with great animation and beginning to fan the invalid. "Do you remember, Granfer dear, how when Mother and I were at Grasse we came quite unexpectedly on the royal carriage, and something had providentially brought it to a stand-still?"

"I remember," said Sir George chuckling, "and you, always a bold little maid, cried out, 'Oh Mammy, do, do let me give my flowers to the Queen.'"

"And then," said Irene, turning to Frank Warren, "Her Majesty smiled—such a smile—like the sunshine of the soul showing through the veil of the face; and the big red anemones seemed really to please her, and she thanked me in a voice as clear and sweet as a bell."

"And you curtsied down to the ground?"

asked the Lieutenant, trying to picture the scene.

"No, I didn't, I forgot all about my stupid knees; it was a dreadful breach of Court etiquette, no doubt, but I was thinking about her smile, and for the first time really loving her instead of just being curious about her. You can't be posturing and posing if you are filled with other thoughts. Granfer dear, I want to show Lieutenant Warren the improvements in the gardens."

"And while you are away I will read Sir George a letter I had this morning from Lady Murchison. She writes about some quotation which I can't feel sure about," said Mrs. Moulton.

"Forgive me for carrying you off so unceremoniously," said Irene, as they wandered through the garden, "but we are obliged as far

as possible to keep my grandfather from dwelling on the war. I believe the anxiety, and his grief over the terrible blunders made, have been the chief cause of his illness."

"I noticed that you pulled me up and guessed that must be the reason."

"Yes, I dragged in that story about Grasse in a most abrupt way, but I knew you would understand. Once embarked in an argument he gets overwrought and suffers terribly afterwards."

"It must have been difficult to avoid the subject."

"Not so hard as you would think, for there are really not many English residents here. Mr. and Mrs. Moulton hoped to the last that war would be avoided. And the English people who manage the cocoa estate are Quakers and disapprove of all war."

"You will perhaps think me a bloodthirsty fellow, but I did envy those men on the 'Powerful' who helped to relieve Ladysmith, and would have given anything to be in their shoes."

"That was natural enough," said Irene. "Everyone longed for the starving inhabitants to be relieved. Those who think the war might have been avoided by wiser negotiations grieve especially for the victims of a bad policy. I can't tell you how my grandfather has suffered all through this weary time."

"I wonder whether he is right about Her Majesty," said Frank Warren musingly.

"Well, he remembers how strongly the Queen and the Prince Consort were opposed to the Crimean War when, as he says, the whole of England went war-mad, though now everyone acknowledges what a blunder it was. He has

always had the deepest admiration for Queen Victoria's character, and if indeed she passes away while this terrible cloud overshadows us all, I think it will break his heart."

When they returned to the summer-house they found that the wife of the Chief Justice had lured the invalid into a different train of thought.

"Sir George knew that quotation Lady Murchison wanted," said Mrs. Moulton. "I was quite wrong about it—he says it is from a poem of Wordsworth's."

"I knew he would be able to tell us," said Irene. "You are far better than the proverbial walking dictionary, Granfer dear."

"Well, to tell the truth, I remember the poet himself reading me the poem," said Sir George. Then, turning to Frank Warren, "When I was a young fellow of twenty, I remember pretty nearly starving myself to scrape money

together for a journey to the Lakes, and armed with introductions to Wordsworth at Rydal Mount, and Hartley Coleridge at Nab Cottage, spent such a holiday as I have never since known."

"What was the poem under discussion?" asked the Lieutenant.

"It was one written during his tour on the Continent in 1820—you probably know it," and the old man recited in a singularly musical voice the lines:

Oh Life! without thy chequered scene
Of right and wrong, of weal and woe,
Success and failure, could a ground
For magnanimity be found;
For faith, 'mid ruined hopes serene?
Or whence could virtue flow?

Pain entered through a ghastly breach—
Nor while sin lasts must effort cease;

.

Mercy has placed within our reach
A portion of God's peace.

There was a little pause at the end. Looking round the quiet summer-house at the white-bearded patriarchal old Governor, at the sweet womanly face of Irene, and her gentle-looking friend, it seemed to the sailor that the peace of which Wordsworth had sung reigned here indeed.

"Some day, Irene, perhaps we will go and see Rydal Water and Grasmere," said the old man. "Oh! I would give much to tread those northern hills; there's a beauty in their misty grey and green that we lose in the tropics."

"Here comes my husband," said Mrs. Moulton, glancing between the hibiscus bushes and catching sight of a tall elderly man, who approached them with a very grave face.

"You have news, Moulton; I know you have further news," said Sir George, bending forward quickly. "Her Majesty?"

"The Queen passed away at half-past six this evening," said the Chief Justice.

There was a dead silence; the Governor covered his face with his hands, Irene felt as if the world had suddenly come to an end. The Lieutenant mused over the strange effect of being in the Western tropics and receiving the telegram some hours before, by English time, the event had happened. Then the sound of a bell tolling in the distance broke the stillness. Its dull melancholy clangour seemed to beat on their hearts.

"Granfer dear, had you not better come in-doors and rest?" said Irene gently.

He raised his head: his face looked like that of an overtired child, in his eyes there was an expression of pathetic bewilderment.

"I want to go home," he said in a broken voice, and fell back on the wicker couch.

They were his last words. Borne by Mr. Moulton and Frank Warren to the house, he lingered for a few hours, then passed quietly away, his last wish painlessly granted.

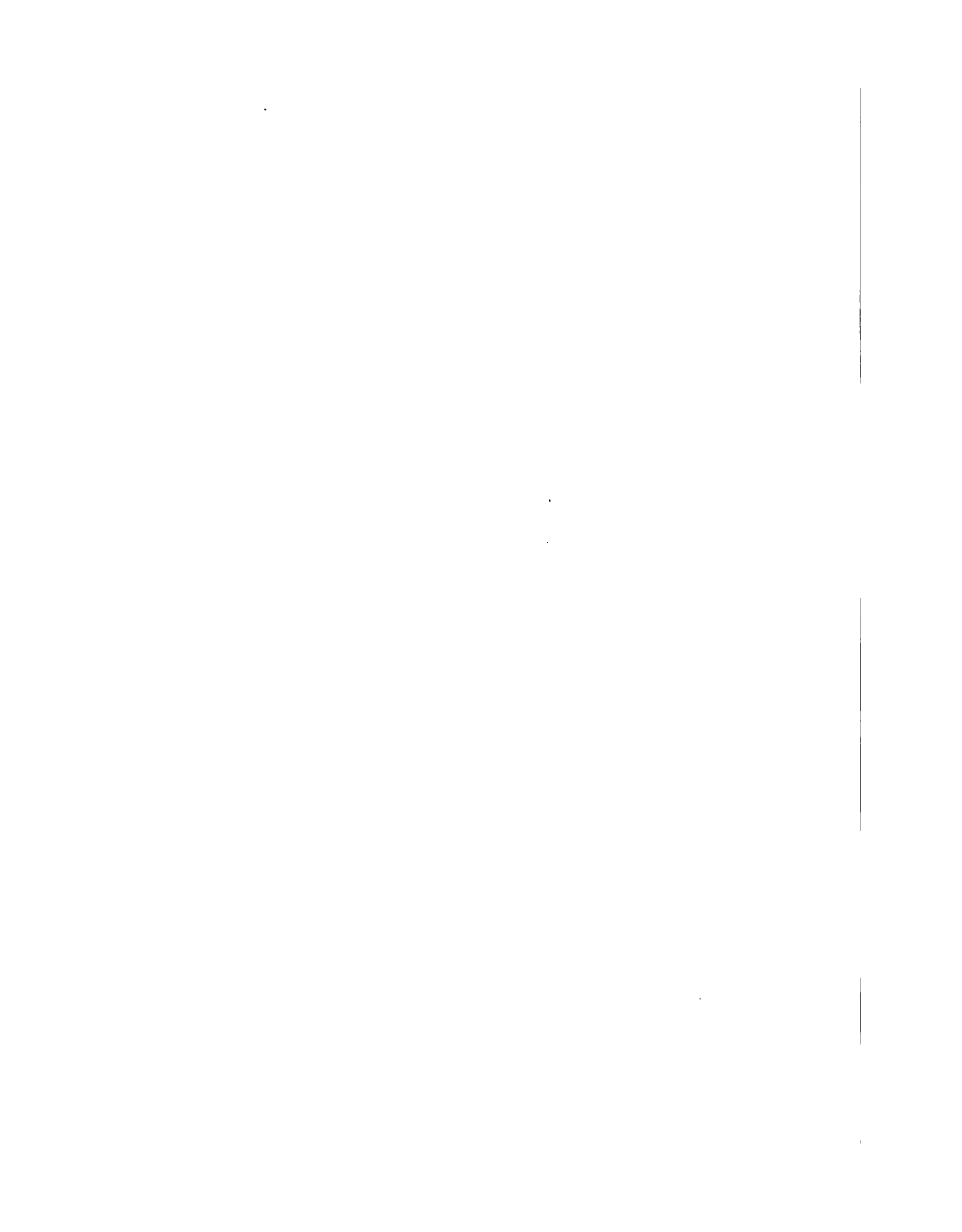
Irene crept to her own room, blinded by tears. Through the open window came the sound of a muffled peal from one of the churches in the town, and the heavy clangour of the single deep bell which had never ceased since the arrival of the news. From the warship crashed out at intervals the thunder of the guns, and the whole world seemed to mourn. Only the fireflies danced blithely in the purple night, and in the next room the white tranquil face of old Sir George smiled as peacefully as a sleeping child.

The girl stole back to the bedside before long to find comfort for her aching loneliness — seeking for some assurance that, in this

appalling sense of change which had overwhelmed both her private life and the life of her nation, there was a beginning as well as an ending.

She knelt for a long time beside the still form, gradually realising that her grandfather had indeed "gone home," and had met his old friends in regions more lovely than the English Lakeland—realising, too, that the Queen, whose influence for good had been so boundless, was taken away from the evil to come.

CHAPTER II.



To dress, to call, to dine, to break
No canon of the social code,
The little laws that lacqueys make
The futile decalogue of mode, —
How many a soul for these things lives
With pious passion, grave intent!
While Nature careless-handed gives
The things that are more excellent.

WILLIAM WATSON.

IRENE left Espaniere in May, and it was not until she had quitted her old home, said farewell to the Chief Justice, Mrs. Moulton, and her other friends, and found herself in her state-room on the steamer, with her cabin-trunk, her bag, and the fox terrier given her the year before by some English visitors, that she quite understood what it means to be alone and without a home.

"What are your bents?" said an old Scotch lady who made friends with her on board, feeling more sympathy than she had the gift of expressing for the lonely girl.

"I have none, that's the worst of it," said Irene ruefully. "No gift for writing or public speaking, or for taking up work among the poor. I'm nothing but an average girl capable of taking care of a house, and only fit for home life. But what is the use of that when one has no home?"

"My dear," said the old Scotchwoman, "the good book says 'He setteth the solitary in families,' and you'll find it's true."

Now it happened that old Sir George de St. Croix had left as his trustees and executors two men who in tastes and sympathies were poles apart. His cousin, Squire Brooklin of Michelhurst, a hospitable sport-loving obstinate

man of sixty; and Sir Christopher Hope, the member for Northwall, a well-known literary man, who in regard to the war in South Africa took much the same line that Cobden had taken in Crimean times. The Hopes had been friends of the de St. Croix for three generations, and Sir George had chosen wisely in making Sir Christopher a trustee, for he was a man of rare and scrupulous honesty, likely to understand the wishes of the Governor of Espaniere far better than Henry Brooklin, who, though a kind-hearted man, was somewhat wanting in refinement.

It chanced, however, that to Mr. Brooklin fell the lion's share of the work in regard to Irene's inheritance, for he had far more leisure than his co-trustee, and was a kinsman, not a mere friend. Moreover, just at the time when the girl was expected to land at Liverpool, Sir

Christopher Hope was taken ill, and knowing that he was likely to get little rest in England his doctor hastily sent him across the Channel, so that in all probability some time would be likely to elapse before Irene met him.

Nothing could exceed the kindness of Mrs. Brooklin's letters, however, and it had been arranged that for the present Irene should make her home with them, leaving herself time to grow accustomed to English life before she made any definite decision as to the future.

The girl's heart beat fast as she approached her own country, and wondered whether it would prove as dear to her as she had always imagined. It was not for nothing that she had lived so long with her grandfather, and his enthusiasm for the past, and the historic atmosphere in which he viewed the

places he had so often described to her, had trained her into a being wholly unlike the ordinary traveller.

Her spirits sank a little when they arrived at Liverpool on a cheerless, drizzling day.

"But it isn't fair to judge by the docks," she said with an involuntary shiver, as she glanced around at the dirt and greyness which contrasted so curiously with the home she had left.

"Oh! you will grow accustomed to that," said her Scotch friend. "And now Hamish and I will see you into the London train, and wish you God-speed. And don't be forgetting your promise to visit us in August in our Highland home."

Hamish, who had constituted himself her *cavalieri servante* on board in an unobtrusive fashion, added many hospitable remarks, and,

having rifled the newsboy of all the papers he thought likely to interest her, bade her a quiet farewell which did not in the least betray the admiration he felt for her.

The weather improved as the express rushed southward, and Irene, finding the illustrated papers which Hamish had provided full of gruesome war-pictures, or of functions in honour of the men who least interested her, turned to the world without, and feasted her eyes on the green pastures and early summer foliage which flitted past in an ever new panorama. The houses with their chimneys, the herds of cattle peacefully feeding, all made up a homelike picture which fascinated her, and she was quick to see the beauty of that misty distance of which her grandfather had so often spoken. She sprang to her feet in delight, when not very far from the line she caught sight of three beautiful spires.

"What cathedral is that?" she demanded eagerly of her fellow-traveller, an elderly lady, who had been absorbed for an hour in a novel called "The Vampire of Vail's Cross."

The lady looked up with an air of surprise, wondering why the girl's eyes were so full of interest.

"That? Let me see, it must be Lichfield—we pass it at no great distance—quite one of the small cathedrals."

"Lichfield!" reflected Irene, recalling stories of the Civil War, and Lord Brooke's tragic death. Surely, too, Lichfield had been the birthplace of Dr. Johnson? How perfect were those spires, and how she longed for something more than this passing glimpse of them!

"She must be an American," reflected the elderly lady. "No one else would spring across a railway-carriage in that way to look

at an old building, or stare out of the window at mere fields and hedges."

And, adjusting her travelling-cushions, she returned to the "Vampire," who had not quite ended his gory progress when the train reached Euston.

Irene, in spite of her uneventful life, was a good traveller, and her possessions were quietly and promptly handed to a porter, and she herself was eagerly looking for some sign of Mr. Brooklin, who had promised to meet her, before the "Vampire" had been crammed with difficulty into an overful bag, and the elderly lady and her cushions had got under way.

"Dan Leno," the fox terrier, was in a state of frantic excitement as they quitted the carriage and found themselves on the crowded platform, and the girl was glad to pick him up in her arms and hold him fast, lest his first London per-

formance should be utter annihilation by the feet of hustling travellers and porters.

At length she caught sight of a ruddy, weather-beaten face set in a frame of chestnut hair frosted with white, and the next moment her hand was grasped in hearty welcome by her cousin.

"Welcome to England, my dear," he said pleasantly. "Don't trouble about your luggage, the men will see to that. We are delighted at the thought of having you with us—delighted. Our only girl was married two years ago, and we are in sad need of a daughter in the house."

"It is very good of you and Cousin Caroline to have me," said Irene, "and not to object to the dog."

"It will be a pleasure to have a dog about the house," said the Squire, glancing approv-

ingly at the fox terrier, who luckily was a dog that anyone might be proud to own. "We haven't a single one in town, but there are plenty down at Michelhurst, and when this confounded season is over we will go down there and you shall see them."

In truth the Squire looked as if he would have been glad to escape at once to his country house, but he was a martyr to convention and doggedly endured the social treadmill, though he would infinitely have preferred a quiet time among his own woods and gardens in Southshire.

The Euston Road seemed to Irene a forlorn sort of place. She was glad when they turned into the quiet Bloomsbury squares, and amused her companion not a little by her exclamations of interest when they drove along Oxford Street.

"I have so often thought of poor De Quincey wandering here in his homeless days, and sleeping on the pavement—don't you recollect how he used to call Oxford Street his 'Stony-hearted Stepmother?'"

Old Sir George would have capped this with some other association, but the Squire could only chuckle.

"I'm blest if I can remember who De Quincey was, my dear; my schooldays are so long past. Now if you'd asked me which side Marshall and Snelgrove's was on, I could have told you."

Irene laughed. "Oh! I shall want to be directed there some day without a doubt," she said. "Is this Hyde Park that we are coming to?"

"Aye, to be sure; we turn down Park Lane, and this is our house and your home, my dear, for as long as you please."

Nothing could have been more kindly than his manner, and already Irene felt that sense of kinship with him which helps to draw together those who otherwise would seem to have nothing in common.

Mrs. Brooklin, in a gorgeously furnished but unhomelike drawing-room, impressed the new-comer much less favourably. Her greeting was pleasant, but everything about her seemed to jar on the girl; her frizzled yellow toupee, her hard beady eyes which seemed always at work taking estimates of things and people and entering them in her mental inventory at their marketable value, and above all her extravagance in dress, offended Irene's taste.

"We shall not get on at all," she reflected, and then her attention was suddenly diverted by the entrance of a man of uncertain age,

whose curious face and cynical expression puzzled her.

"This is another kinsman of yours," said the Squire, "my nephew, Victor Brooklin, who makes this house his headquarters when he is in England."

Irene felt her fingers clasped by the boniest and thinnest of hands, and met a pair of bright mocking eyes which startled her by their unconcealed curiosity. She had never heard of this cousin before, and wondered whether it was illness which had prematurely aged him, or whether he was an elderly man aping youth.

However, she was glad enough of the tea he handed her, and, hearing that there was a dinner-party that night, thought it best to retire before long to the pleasant bedroom which had been assigned to her.

"I am sorry to have to put you so high up,"

said Mrs. Brooklin. "You should have had my daughter's old room, but I have been obliged to put poor Victor there this year. He can't manage the stairs."

"He is ill, then?" asked Irene.

"Yes, the only wonder is that he's alive. An affection of the heart—he may die any day, poor fellow. If it were not for that I should object to having him here so much, but one can't judge a man severely when he has so much to put up with and is forced to miss so many pleasures. Shall I ring for your maid? One ring will bring the housemaid, so now you'll know."

"I haven't brought a maid with me," said Irene. "If it is necessary I thought one could be more easily found here, but for the last five years I have done without one, and really prefer to be independent."

"Well, they are sometimes more plague than profit," said Mrs. Brooklin, not ill pleased to find that her visitor held these unusual views, for the accommodation for servants in Park Lane was rather limited.

She returned to the drawing-room, where the Squire and Victor Brooklin still lingered in the neighbourhood of the afternoon tea-table.

"Well! what do you think of her?" she demanded.

"A very nice little girl, and as like old George de St. Croix as can be," said the Squire.

"Little girl, indeed!" retorted his wife. "Why, she is six or seven and twenty at the very least, and looks it. She is too white to be pretty, like all these people from the tropics. However, the climate doesn't seem to have enervated her. She actually doesn't mean to keep a maid—prefers to be independent, she said."

"Sensible girl," said the Squire. "That's just as well. For between ourselves, when all is arranged I doubt if she'll have more than 500*l.* a year of her own."

"My dear Henry! is it as bad as that? Why, it will barely keep her decently dressed," said Mrs. Brooklin, whose yearly dress expenses always mounted up to something in four figures. "Then my work is cut out for me. I must get her well married without loss of time."

"You talk, dear aunt, as though she were the most docile of maidens," said Victor. "It may be so, of course, but as the Scotchman remarked when asked if he thought any in the village but himself would be saved—'I hae me doots.'"

"She seemed to me a very gentle-looking girl. What makes you say that?"

"Because it is not the shrieking sisterhood but just these gentle quiet women who have the real resisting power."

"Pooh! a pale-faced chit who has spent her life in a little far-away island! My dear Victor, I don't believe she has any fight in her. I shall have her safely engaged to a man of good position before we leave London. A disconsolate widower would be the very thing, or that rich son of Mrs. Garoway's."

Victor smiled satirically.

"It will be an amusing study, but I will stake fifty to one that you fail, dear lady. Miss de St. Croix is, if I read her aright, capable of refusing a duke or a millionaire if she were not absolutely in love."

"When did you begin to have faith in womanly disinterestedness?" said Mrs. Brooklin scornfully.

"When I first saw my cousin Irene," he re-

plied, with cool nonchalance. "Converted late in life, you see."

And he strolled out of the room, humming an air from "San Toy."

Victor Brooklin was one of those people who might have had a great career had they been forced to work for their living. Unluckily he had inherited at one-and-twenty a comfortable income, and had ever since only played with art in a dilettante fashion. The Squire was his sole near relative, and when at five-and-thirty he found that failing health made it impossible for him to live the Bohemian life which for a dozen years had contented him, he accepted the hospitable offer of making his headquarters at his kinsman's house. It was something to have comfortable rooms, and to be saved the trouble of making his own arrangements. But though he seldom complained and veiled his real self behind

a careless cynicism, his life was a singularly unhappy one.

Irene had not been long in the house without discovering this, and the knowledge of the precarious hold he had upon life touched the motherliness within her, and drew her naturally to him. He, in the meantime finding an interesting study in a type of womanhood he had never yet come across, watched his new cousin during the next few days with a keen perception of the difficulties and disillusionments which were making her first glimpse of London life in the "smart set" no easy bit of walking.

One afternoon, when luncheon was over and some not very congenial guests had just taken leave, he noticed a tired look in the big blue-grey eyes, and, quitting his customary *rôle* of watcher, took the first definite step towards a genuine friendship with his cousin.

"I wish you would do me a great favour," he said. "All the morning I have been at work on a portrait of Hal, but I want a candid criticism—will you come down to my den and look at the thing?"

"I will gladly come, but how can I criticise when I have not yet seen the child?"

"That doesn't matter; it's not so much the likeness I want your opinion about as the technique."

He led the way to his painting-room, and Irene glanced round the comfortably untidy place with a sense of relief.

"You seem to like my snugery," he said, with a smile.

"I do; compared with the other rooms it is what a bit of the tropical forest would be to Hyde Park."

"Is it the rooms or the people you find *borné*?" he asked.

"Both!" she said impetuously. "At lunch to-day it was just like being slowly suffocated; how can one really live when one hasn't an idea in common with those one meets?"

"I watched you sandwiched between that South-African money-bag and the brainless Lord Grassdale, and wondered how you were faring. You had a rather depressed look."

Irene laughed. It was something at any-rate to have a safety-valve, and she saw that the cynical look had died out of Victor's face and noticed that his tone was kind and friendly.

"It's my own fault, I suppose," she said. "I have been too much of an onlooker these last few days, too much of the silent critic."

"I go through life in that character," said Victor, "and manage to get a certain amount of amusement as a spectator."

Irene mused for a minute, then looked up at him with candid eyes. "But it seems to me a little unfair. I have a horrid feeling all the time that one ought to be up and doing. Surely one can't judge things fairly unless one is sharing in the general life? A mere watcher must tend to grow carping and hard."

"I don't think you will ever be hard," he said, looking a little wistfully at the sweet face, as Irene approached the easel on which his painting stood. "You are much more likely to suffer horribly all your life from being too tender-hearted. Should I have brought a carping critic so boldly to look at this wretched daub?"

"How can you abuse your work?" she said, looking intently at the picture. "Of course I can't judge of it as a likeness, but I think the painting is beautiful."

"He's a jolly little beggar," said Victor,

looking at the fresh rosy-checked boy of thirteen, whose merry grey eyes seemed to twinkle at them from the canvas. "You wouldn't believe what a business I had to keep him from cropping his hair as though he had just come out of gaol—vowed it was so beastly hot as soon as it was a quarter of an inch long."

"I wish he were here," said Irene; "a child about the house would alter everything."

"He wouldn't bless you for the wish. Why, he would be as much out of his element in Park Lane as you are. No, no; he's having the best time of his whole life at Harrow, playing cricket and learning what only can be learnt at a public school."

"I shall look forward to his holidays; he looks brimful of fun," said Irene, "and there's a cousinly look about him, too. I fancy my grandfather must have been just that kind of

boy. Oh! how I wish you could have painted him!"

"I am going to be bold enough to ask you to sit to me," said Victor. "You'll be doing me a real kindness if you could possibly make time."

She willingly consented, pleased to find some means of cheering the invalid, and without further delay he drew forward a high-backed chair for her and began rapidly to sketch the features, wondering whether he should ever be able to give to his picture the nobility of that sweet open-looking face which appealed to all that was good in him.

"Did you ever see Luini's 'Holy Family' in Lugano Cathedral?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied. "It is one of the few great pictures I have seen. I was once at Lugano for a week with my mother, and though

only a little schoolgirl that picture delighted me. There is something so beautiful and natural in the child playing with the lamb."

"Do you remember the face of the Madonna?"

"Yes, quite well—a calm sweet face full of mother-love. I thought it like my own mother."

Victor had just been thinking that if the Madonna's tresses had not been parted, but thrown back and the soft hair pushed in overhanging masses about the forehead, Irene herself might have sat for the picture. But he knew her well enough not to put the thought into words. Instead, he asked her about her schooldays in Switzerland, and when the time came for the girl to drive with Mrs. Brooklin she felt in better spirits than she had done since her arrival.

CHAPTER III.

1

There is more of misery inflicted upon mankind by one year of war, than by all the civil peculations and oppressions in a century. Yet it is a state into which the mass of mankind rush with the greatest avidity, hailing official murderers, in scarlet, gold, and cock's feathers, as the greatest, and most glorious of human creatures. It is the business of every wise and good man to set himself against this passion for military glory, which really seems to be the most fruitful source of human misery.—SYDNEY SMITH.

BREAKFAST was a meal which people took at whatever time they pleased, and Irene had no companion but "Dan Leno" when she came down on the morning of her first Sunday in England. The dog sat gravely beside her; his long thin face was entirely black save for two little tan marks above the bright eyes, and a white V on his forehead; but his body was all

white, and after his Saturday tub he was looking his best.

She had finished her meal when Victor Brooklin strolled in.

"So you are the first," he said. "That's very energetic of you after going to the opera last night. How did you enjoy yourself?"

"Oh! it was beautiful," she said. "Only there were two stupid men who would talk through everything. That's the worst of a box—they don't mind how they behave."

"Why, did you think they went to the opera for the music?" said Victor, with a laugh. "No, no; they went to amuse themselves. What have you done to Dan Leno? He is worthy of being painted with you."

"It's all the effect of a bath," she replied, laughing. "How I wish you would put him in

the picture! he is much more worth painting than his mistress."

"By-the-bye, I heard his mistress taken to task last night by my worthy aunt for not painting."

"I know. Mrs. Brooklin really seemed quite vexed, but I can't and won't rouge to please anyone. It would always make me think of an old French lady who went by the name of Jezebel in Espaniere: she wore the most marvellous Parisian bonnets and rouged her poor haggard old cheeks in the most ghastly way."

"Yet you probably noticed that the majority of the audience last night owed something to rouge and pearl powder?"

"Yes, that is true enough; but I'd rather be with the clean minority," and she laughed.

"I rather suspect you always will be with the minority," he said, glancing at her curiously.

"You haven't learnt the trick of howling with the wolves—you don't hunger and thirst for what people call 'a great success,' or for wealth, or for any of the other things that most women crave for."

"I seem to be in between two chapters of life," said Irene, her eyes fixed wistfully on the trees across the road; though in reality she did not see the Park at all, but the tropical beauty of her old home. "In my old life every hour of the day was filled, and there was always someone to be helped. Now, I seem only able to be an onlooker, like a child who wants to help but doesn't know how to set to work. And then in this huge place one sees such heartrending contrasts: the poor look so abjectly miserable, and the rich so apathetic. And, worst of all, there is this endless war, which seems to vulgarise all who glory in it, and to be hurrying the nation

on to a doom that one shudders to think of. But I don't know why I am treating you to such a jeremiad."

"Don't stop, it's a new sensation," he said, but as at that moment Mrs. Brooklin came in, a break naturally occurred. She nodded a careless greeting to them.

"How *triste* Sunday morning is!" she said lightly. "No letters and no 'Morning Post!' Well, never mind, I have a treat in store for you, Irene; your cousin is not quite the thing to-day, and won't go down to lunch at Richmond with the Carshaltons. You shall come with me instead. I hear Lord Habasher is to be there, and no doubt you'll be glad of the chance of seeing him. This toast is like leather. James! get a fresh rackful. Very hot and airless this morning, but we shall find it pleasant at Richmond."

Irene felt glad that James disappeared; only Victor and the benevolent-looking butler, Henderson, who had been in the family for years, and had won her heart by speaking to her of her grandfather, remained in the room.

"It is so kind of you to have thought of taking me," she said, her colour rising a little. "But I am going to church this morning."

"Oh, my dear, don't waste this summer day in a hot London church," said Mrs. Brooklin, a little vertical line becoming visible in the middle of her forehead. "That sort of thing is all very well when nothing interferes, but it isn't every day that you get the chance of meeting a great man fresh from South Africa."

"It is always interesting to meet celebrities," said Irene, "and I am really sorry to say 'No' to your kind plan for me."

There was something so absolutely final

in her tone that Mrs. Brooklin began to feel seriously annoyed. Was this gentle-looking girl, only a few days in England, presuming to go her own way and set at naught the plans of her elders?

"I quite understand that at Espaniere, where you were the Governor's lady, it was etiquette for you to go to the English church, and of course in the country I usually go for the sake of setting an example to the tenants. But here in London it is quite a different thing. And I do assure you that Matins are now positively unfashionable. A very clever young clergyman said to me the other day at Lady Lampster's that Matins were the dullest and least satisfactory service we had, and had been originally intended for monks and nuns."

"A more conceited ass I never set eyes on," said Victor, unfolding the "Referee." "He was

a regular 'spike'—the sort of idiot that makes an average Englishman feel his gorge rise."

"What in the world is a 'spike?'" asked Irene.

"Some High Churchmen are at the same time broad and liberal, but a 'spike' is the current name for one who is ultra-high and extremely narrow."

"Well, if he was narrow, he was at any rate very well connected," said Mrs. Brooklin. "The carriage is to be here at twelve o'clock, Irene, and I should advise you to wear something cool."

"You are very kind," repeated Irene with an effort. "But, you see, I have a previous engagement."

"Absurd to call Morning Service an engagement," said Mrs. Brooklin with a sneer; and she drew a piece of toast from the rack with

such emphasis that the silver rang, and James preserved his statuesque expression with difficulty. "If you were my daughter, I should insist on your yielding."

"I am sorry to vex you," said Irene, "but there are some things one must hold fast to." And, picking up the fox terrier in her arms, she left the room.

"A more wilful girl I never saw," said Mrs. Brooklin. "I have no patience with people who don't adapt themselves to their surroundings. She ought to take the tone of her host and hostess, and not air her own opinions—it's extremely rude and tiresome. Will you come, Victor?"

"Thanks—but I, too, am engaged," he replied with a yawn. "Why not take that pretty little widow who is always hanging on to you? She is in the most fascinating black-and-white stage,

and would enjoy seeing the South African lion put through his tricks."

"That's not a bad idea; she is a very presentable little woman, and is always popular. I shall wash my hands of Irene if she means to pose as a Sabbatarian. That sort of thing is so *bourgeois*."

"Everyone to his liking," said Victor, yawning. "To my mind, she is far more piquante and refreshing than your little widow."

He presently encountered Irene on the stairs; she was wearing a particularly becoming *toque*, but his artist eye quickly noted the wistful look in her face. Her loneliness appealed to him.

"Which direction are you going in?" he asked.

She mentioned the church she had chosen. "I want to see it, for it is one of the old historic churches, and I have heard so much about it."

"That is my way, too," he said. "May I go with you?"

Her face lighted up, and he saw that she was glad of his company. She fancied that he had some appointment in the same quarter, and only grasped the fact that he intended to stay with her when they were close to their destination.

"You are making me break through the habits of a dozen years," he said, with his half-cynical smile. "I have consistently attended nothing but weddings and funerals, and was saving up for my own funeral without a thought of darkening a church-door beforehand."

"You talk as if you would be at your own funeral," she said, unable to repress a smile at his dry humorous tone.

"I only echo the language of several pious burial hymns," he retorted. "But, in truth, I

neither know nor care where I shall be. I own to nothing but a faint curiosity."

She was silent. It was hard to know what to reply to banter on such a topic.

"It is only women like you who know all about those regions," he continued. "Thackeray somewhere speaks of what will take place when he is on a cloud, singing, or a pot, boiling."

"Thackeray knew, I think, Whom he would be with," she said quietly, "and that surely is all that matters. Nobody can know anything about the *where*."

He paused for an instant before crossing the road to the church, and bought a Sunday paper from one of the newsboys.

"Let us see what preacher we are doomed to listen to," he said. "By Jove! that's odd! 'Tis to be my old head-master, Dr. Beresford."

"Is he a very great preacher?"

"Oh, no — not what you would call an orator, but a man who means with his whole heart every word he says. He is that rarest of all beings, a Church dignitary who is manly enough to stand alone in an unpopular cause. However much people dislike his Radicalism, they can't help respecting him and listening to him."

An enormous congregation had gathered together in the old historic church, and absorbed in the beautiful service Irene forgot all about her cousin's remarks as to the preacher until she saw Dr. Beresford standing in the pulpit.

He was a tall, powerful-looking man. His white hair, his grave virile face and far-seeing eyes, suggested to Irene a picture she had once seen of a northern shepherd guiding his sheep through a rough mountain glen, and carrying in a fold of his plaid a motherless lamb.

"The Lord be with you," said the preacher.

"And with thy spirit," responded the congregation.

Then they settled themselves comfortably, some to listen, some to criticise, some for their customary nap. But the attention of all was instantly arrested by the strange text which the preacher read from St. Luke's gospel:

"Ye hindered."

It was as if the accusation had been brought to every creature in the church. The people were pricked at heart, and sat up, listening intently. Irene, without any hesitation, took out her pocket-book and hurriedly noted down as much as she could of the sermon, with an instinct that here would be the very leading she needed in her difficult new life.

"They were stern words to fall from the lips of the gentle and compassionate Saviour of the world. As a consequence of such an accusation

of those in power, the blind leaders of the blind, his life was imperilled, for the religious authorities of the day went about trying to lay traps which would ensnare this new teacher who, coming from the despised Galilee, presumed to denounce the great men of Jerusalem. It is easy to condemn the blindness, the pride, the bigotry, the unfairness of those religious Jews of the past, but it is not for us to judge them; let us judge ourselves that we be not judged of the Lord. We all of us pray, day after day, 'Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done in earth as it is in heaven.' But is it not true, alas! that to every soul in this church the sorrowful reproach might be uttered by the Saviour who has sacrificed all for love of us—'Ye hindered?'

"For in everyday life the struggle is not to help the coming of the Kingdom of Christ—that has become a mere phrase on the lips of many;

and as to attempting to do the will of God on earth as it is done in heaven, the majority of people would mock at such an idea, would call it a Utopian dream. Those who propounded it as a scheme for the everyday life of the twentieth century would be held up to ridicule—would be accounted well-meaning visionaries, mild idiots who vainly imagined that their beautiful theories could stand against the dominating wave of force and militarism, and greed of gain passing over the country.

“Let us dwell for a few minutes on the Bible definition of the Kingdom of God. ‘The Kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.’

“A nation whose thoughts are full of the passion of conquest, constantly seeking to gain fresh possessions, though unable to promote the true

good and to heal the grievous needs of the people for whom it is already responsible, is in opposition to the mind and teaching of Christ. Let us hush our strife and clamour and think quietly of the character of that Leader Whom we have all solemnly vowed to follow and obey."

The speaker's voice grew indescribably gentle, and a great stillness prevailed in the crowded church.

"‘The Prince of Peace’ was ‘meek and lowly of heart.’ He brought ‘rest to the souls’ of men. ‘When He was reviled He reviled not again; when He suffered He threatened not!’ His meat was ‘to do the will of His Father and to finish His work.’ ‘He went about doing good.’ He overcame evil, not by the devil’s weapon of violence, but by the divine power of self-sacrificing love. He prayed for His torturers. He understood their utter ignorance and made excuse for them.

Ask yourselves honestly: Have we as a nation been truly helping the Saviour of the world through this sorrowful crisis—this heart-breaking war—or have we hindered? You are a free people, the responsibility rests on each man and woman in the country; you can't thrust the blame onto some convenient scape-goat. Have you followed with the multitude to do evil, or have you, with all your might, tried to obey the teaching and imitate the example of the Prince of Peace?

“It fell to my lot at Christmas to hear the heartbroken cry of an English mother who had suffered through the war, and the words still ring in my ears—‘Why does not Christ hear the misery crying out to Him, and manifest Himself as the Prince of Peace, and end the discord, the misery, the wickedness, the sorrow of which the world is weary?’

“Does not Christ, hearing that cry of anguish, turn and look upon us as He looked once upon the disciple who had disowned Him, and utter the reproachful words—‘Ye hindered?’ Does He not over this great city still weep as he wept over Jerusalem? Does He not say, ‘Oh that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea?’

“Are we then to despair? And is evil going to triumph? No; for the same Saviour Who wept over the erring, left His followers a motto which speaks of the hope that maketh not ashamed: ‘Be of good cheer. I have overcome the world.’ Though we have been among the hinderers, we may yet turn and help. Not absent from any man or woman in the world, though often hidden, is the desire to do right. That element of the divine which is in every human being may seem

to be quenched, but it is immortal. It flickers into flame when men rouse themselves earnestly to think how far practical Christianity is possible.

“‘This talk of Christ-following may be well enough in church or on Sunday,’ many say, ‘but we can’t carry out Christ’s teaching in political matters; we can’t obey His commands in Society; we can’t succeed in our business, our profession, our art, if we try to follow after His high ideals. Christian philosophy seems to us visionary, impracticable—in the present day it spells ruin.’

“My brothers, Christianity is the one practical working system which cannot in the end fail. What has become of the vainglorious and boastful empires of the past? They have perished. It is true, for all time, that you cannot serve God and Mammon. But whole-hearted obedience to Christ—the life of peace, of justice, of humble

walking with God, will help to hasten his Kingdom.

“For awhile, as a great present-day painter has represented in one of his most powerful pictures, Mammon, the hideous, bloated, self-satisfied monster appears to triumph; he crushes under foot the poor toiler; he holds in his vile grasp the defenceless woman; he glories in gold and vice and violence; but his triumph is short. The night is far spent, the day is at hand when we shall join in the thanksgiving chorus—“The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.”

“And God has not left Himself without witness in this present age. We can all call to mind statesmen who went straight from communion with God to their parliamentary duties; reformers who were true philanthropists,

because their hearts were aglow with love for Christ; merchants whose honour and integrity would not let them soil their souls with the sordid speculations which are the worst form of gambling; tradesmen who loved God and their *employés* better than filthy lucre, and contented themselves with moderate and just gains; artists who laboured for love's sake, and whose works from their purity and beauty and truth are the country's heirlooms. Do we ask

When comes the promised time
That war shall be no more,
When lust, oppression, crime,
Shall flee Thy face before?

It will dawn when the hinderers become helpers. We are too apt to call complainingly upon God to arise. It is we ourselves who must arise; each individual man and woman is called on to be Christ's co-worker in the great fight against

evil, the great struggle for righteousness, peace, and joy.

“The false prophets, prompted by the father of lies, are for ever urging us to fall back into a brutal materialism, a belief in force. But you who would be helpers, not hinderers, will seek better things, for you will tread in that way of the Cross which is the way of light.

“Righteousness—that is, the being in the right order or state—is with those who trust in God and His methods, who follow after the things which make for peace, and who learn that joy in the Holy Ghost is the outcome of self-surrender and divine love, and is the very anti-thesis of self-love and grasping greed.

“‘In the world ye shall have tribulation.’ Christ knows how human nature shrinks from scorn, from isolation, from abuse; but those who

will be His helpers must learn to endure hardness. As old Rutherford wrote in the difficult seventeenth-century days: 'God hath called you to Christ's side, and the wind is now in Christ's Face in this land; seeing ye are with Him, ye cannot expect the leeseide or the sunny side of the brae.'

"Count the cost. It may involve loss of friends, loss of popularity, loss of all that the world most values—but remember that He Who said 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his life?'—will either say to you sorrowfully 'Ye hindered,' or will welcome you as His faithful servants and make you the sharers of His joy.

"Now the Lord of Peace Himself give you peace at all times and in all ways. Amen."

This was all that Irene had time hastily to take down—an imperfect and condensed

fragment of a sermon which was to influence many lives, spoken with the rare attractiveness of a strong personality, and aided by that simple directness of manner, that mingling of strength and gentleness, which characterised Dr. Beresford.

"Shocking!" remarked one lady to her companion, as they quitted the church. "He's evidently a pro-Boer."

"Yes. But he's an exception. Most of the clergy are particularly patriotic."

"Not at all up to date," remarked a clever-looking girl to an empty-headed youth.

"I like Beresford—he's so straight," said one man to another. "Wish all parsons were like him."

"Made them sit up, didn't he?" was the reply.

The cousins, overhearing these snatches of

conversation, involuntarily glanced at each other. The cynical look had utterly left Victor's eyes, but beneath the little humorous gleam there was deep sadness. Irene felt that no spoken words could have drawn them so near to each other as that one comprehending glance. They knew now that they were friends who would not fail each other.

CHAPTER IV.

It is a hard thing to be in the world, and not of it, to be outwardly much like other people, and yet to be cherishing an ideal which extends over the whole of life and beyond; to have a natural love for everyone, specially for the poor, and to get rid, not of wit and humour, but of frivolity and excitement,—to live selfless according to the will of God and not after the fashion and opinion of men and women.

Life and Letters of Benjamin Jowett.

“LADY NEWMINSTER,” announced Henderson, throwing open the door of the drawing-room about four o’clock that afternoon.

Irene, looking up from the letter she was writing, saw a daintily dressed girl whose face was not unlike the portrait of Hal which Victor was painting, except that whereas the one face was innocent and happy, the other bore a forced smile. Putting down her pen, she crossed the room with a frank cousinly greeting.

The Hinderers.

"I should have been before to call on you," said Lady Newminster, speaking in a hard crisp voice, "but it was such a rush all last week; people have realised that I have come back from India, and I don't get a moment's peace."

"Cousin Caroline told me you were very much taken up. I should have known you from the photograph we had at Espaniere of your wedding group."

Lady Newminster laughed. The laugh matched the smile—it was the forced laugh which people learn when they are secretly unhappy but try to keep up appearances, and which sometimes remains as a legacy long after the unhappiness has passed. Irene glanced at her, and something of sympathy and understanding must have been in her quiet eyes, for her cousin suddenly threw off the mask behind which she

usually lived and allowed herself the luxury of being natural.

"It's nice of you to recognise me from that photograph," she said, with a sigh. "I wonder you do, for I have lived through ages of misery in those two years. I don't admit that to most people, but you look as if you were kind-hearted. I once tried in my misery to tell my difficulties to a chaplain's wife in the Hills, but she turned on me with that chilling churchly look which is so intolerable, and said that it was almost invariably the fault of the wife when a marriage was unhappy."

"How could she be so unjust?" said Irene indignantly.

"Oh! she had lived for years with a husband who had probably never given her a cross word, and she judged other men by him. I don't blame her for that, but one would think

years of happiness would make one more tender-hearted to less fortunate folk."

"It is the sorrows of life that force us to open wide the shut doors of our hearts," said Irene.

Lady Newminster seemed to muse over the words for a few moments.

"What an extraordinary thing it is," she said at length, "that you and I have only been together a few minutes and yet have gone straight to the real things, Irene! We are cousins, to be sure, but that doesn't often count for much."

"I hope in our case it will count for a great deal, Milly," and there was a gleam of humour in Irene's eyes. "To tell the truth, I have been needing you badly. This London life bewilders me—all the chatter and banter and smart talk seem to me meaningless and empty. You see, I have lived always with a gentleman

of the old school—and a literary man, whose ways were utterly different.”

“I don’t wonder you are bewildered,” said Milly. “Why, it must be like reading nothing but Waverley novels, and then being set down to unlimited problem plays. And yet I like the rush of life; I like running about from one amusement to another. Half of it is vulgar and most of it is heartless, but it keeps one from thinking. It’s like waltzing with a neuralgic headache—it may make you worse afterwards, but it distracts you just at the time.”

“What a forlorn simile! It makes me long to tuck you up, metaphorically, in a quiet room with a cup of tea.”

“That may do for good resigned people. But I mean to die game and to fight my fate,” said Milly, with a steely gleam in her eyes. “Life’s a

miserable business, but I shall laugh and dance my way through it somehow."

"And help your country cousin in the intervals," said Irene, laughing brightly. "Cousin Henry teases me for going about with Baedeker's 'London' tucked under my arm."

"As if you were abroad," said Milly, smiling. "What a delightfully original idea! It never struck me that London was worth studying in that way."

"Victor is going to take me to the National Gallery and the Wallace Collection; and, oh! couldn't you and I go to the Tate Gallery together,—there are pictures there I am longing to see."

"Of course I will go with you," said Milly, attracted by the freshness and enthusiasm which seemed to her so extraordinary in a woman of six or seven and twenty. "We will go on Wednesday. I'm free that afternoon, and you'll lunch

with me first, won't you? I have taken a little house in Beauchamp Place, Pont Street, for the season."

They were still talking together, Milly with an unaccountable feeling of restfulness to which she had long been a stranger, when the house suddenly became alive with eager voices and laughter.

"Mamma has come back from Richmond," said Milly, with undisguised regret; "and I know by her tone of triumph that she has the Fitzalbens in tow."

"Who are they?" asked Irene.

"They are the next step up," said Milly, "and Mamma, having got her nose into their set, is trying, like the camel in the Eastern story, to push further and further in. The next move will be that by hook or by crook she will get the Fitzalbens to stay with us at Michelhurst."

It was clear that Mrs. Brooklin had had a

successful day. She beamed on her daughter and on Irene, presented the latter to the Fitzalbans, and chattered happily about the people they had met, the dresses, the merits of Lord Habasher, and the perfection of the weather.

"You missed a great treat, Irene," she concluded. "This perverse girl is a regular little Puritan, and insisted on trotting off to church as if she were still at school."

"Well, well," said Lady Fitzalban pleasantly, "I have no doubt she is musical, and has been enjoying herself as much as we have. There are many really fine choirs just now, to say nothing of popular preachers. Whom did you hear this morning?"

"Dr. Beresford," said Irene.

"You don't say so! Fitz, Miss de St. Croix heard a sermon from Dr. Beresford—that anti-war firebrand."

"The fellow ought to be suppressed as a pestilent nuisance," said Lord Fitzalban. "They call him the pro-Boer prater. Why won't he keep to his own business and preach the gospel?"

"He did, this morning," said Irene, colouring—"the Gospel of Peace."

There was an uncomfortable silence, broken by Lady Fitzalban.

"I am afraid you would have been much better employed at Richmond," she said, laughing. "You would have seen Lord Habasher, and learnt something of the gospel of efficiency and Imperialism."

"Do you think he has proved himself very efficient over the Concentration Camps?" said Irene, with a look of pain in her eyes.

"Certainly I do," said Lady Fitzalban stoutly. "A most humane thing to provide for such wretched uncleanly creatures at all. No other

nation but England would have behaved so nobly."

"Then you really think that after burning their houses and belongings, and driving thousands of women and children into camps where water was always scarce and soap generally unobtainable, we have a right to criticise their habits? If people of all classes were driven from the east and west of London into Hyde Park, and forced to camp there for months, would not the state of things be as insanitary?"

"For my part, I think the idea of camping in Hyde Park is quite idyllic on a hot summer's day like this," said Lady Fitzalban, laughing. "Think of the nice cool green grass, and the birds singing overhead."

"And Mrs. Prodgers of Whitechapel with her six screaming children in a tent on one side," said Victor Brooklin, handing the guest a cup of

tea with an inscrutable smile, "and a voluble virago from Wapping, whose habits are somewhat primitive, on the other side."

"I always imagined the Boers were all of the same class," said Lady Fitzalban.

"Oh, no; there are great distinctions, as among ourselves," said Victor, with a gleam of amusement, perceptible only to those who knew him well, flickering about his grave lips. "But they are, of course, all flesh and blood."

"There's uncommonly little blood in the pro-Boers; they are an anæmic lot, with their fads about peace and mercy," said Lady Fitzalban.

This feline amenity was directed at Irene, and Victor paid it out by the most quiet "retort courteous."

"I never met a pro-Boer," he said, with easy nonchalance. "It is a press term, isn't

it? But my old head-master, Beresford, is a tremendous peace advocate, and I admire his pluck and honesty. He's worth all the rest of his brethren put together, to my way of thinking."

"I like to see a man loyal to his old school traditions," said Lady Fitzalban graciously. "Why, what a beautiful fox terrier you have, Mr. Brooklin!"

"Dan Leno belongs to Miss de St. Croix," said the Squire, who had just entered. "He's a fine fellow, isn't he, and as slim as his great original who, by-the-bye, was in the Park just now."

"Oh! how I wish I had seen him!" said Irene. "I have set my heart on seeing Dan Leno; he must be the most amusing man in England."

Lady Fitzalban was attracted by the genuine eagerness of the tone; her conscience moreover

pricked her a little, for she was by no means an ill-natured woman, and she wished she had not spoken of anæmic pro-Boers.

“How wonderfully fresh and genuine Miss de St. Croix is!” she said, turning to her hostess. “You and Mr. Brooklin must bring her to Abbotsmoor in the autumn; she would, I think, be interested in our rambling old country house, with its ancient and very tiresome ghost, and its gallery of seventeenth-century beauties.”

Irene responded to the invitation with such evident pleasure that Mrs. Brooklin absolutely hugged her when the Fitzalbans had left.

“My dear, I forgive you all your provoking fads about Sunday, and your unpatriotic care for those wicked Boers, for you have brought about the very thing I wanted, and now we are secure of a visit to the Fitzalbans.”

"Had I anything to do with it?" said Irene, with a puzzled look. "I thought Lady Fitzalban cordially disliked me till cousin Henry and Dan came in. I believe, Dan dear, you bewitched her. But it will be delightful to stay in that old Elizabethan house."

"I am not so sure that Irene will think it delightful when she is there," reflected Milly, as she drove back to Beauchamp Place. "But I sha'n't say anything to her beforehand. What an odd thing it is to find in our world someone who rings quite true! Perhaps the old nursery saying 'As good as gold' is right at anyrate in that sense."

CHAPTER V.

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Friendship cannot be permanent unless it becomes spiritual. There must be fellowship in the deepest things of the soul, community in the highest thoughts, sympathy with the best endeavours.—*Friendship*, HUGH BLACK.

MILLY'S story was a very ordinary one, and as the two cousins saw more of each other Irene soon gathered all the facts. As a child she had been allowed to run wild at Michelhurst, under the care of a mild elderly governess who was too weakly in health and too soft in disposition to cope with her headstrong charge. At fourteen she had been sent to school at Dresden, and returning in four years a very pretty and attractive girl, she determined to have a thoroughly good time. Unfortunately the society which would have contented Milly

did not at all content her mother, for Mrs. Brooklin was one of those pushful people who can never rest satisfied with the present. A born schemer, she allowed nobody any peace, and after three years she fairly worried her daughter into an engagement with Lord Newminster, a man the girl neither loved nor respected. There was a reprieve of eighteen months, for Lord Newminster had an appointment in India, and Milly had a convenient attack of scarlatina just when her mother was hoping that the wedding might take place; and after that she lived in a fool's paradise, hoping that something would again happen to postpone their union. But nothing did happen; again a day was fixed, and Milly felt a flutter of interest in choosing her beautiful trousseau. She even enjoyed the arrival of the presents, and kept putting off in a childish way

all grave thought as to the marriage itself; until at last she found herself standing before the altar in a crowded London church, wondering with a sick sense of terror whether, even now she could turn back, wishing feebly that she could faint, and then suddenly being agitated lest she should not have her gloves off in time. She was struggling with the last of the many buttons when Lord Newminster had reached his "I will," and had only just handed the gloves to her first bridesmaid when she too had to repeat the same irrevocable words.

After that, excitement carried her through, and she passed for a radiantly happy bride. It was only when she found her little brother Hal waiting to say good-bye to her in an obscure corner, as she came down from her room dressed for the wedding journey, that tears rushed to her eyes.

"Oh Milly, I wish you weren't going," he said in a choky voice. "It'll be so beastly dull without you."

"Dear old boy," she said, stopping to kiss his rosy face. "Who knows? I may be back again soon! It's a horrid unhealthy climate. Don't watch me go, run and eat ices and leave these idiots down below to throw rice and shoes."

The unhealthy climate was put forward as the reason of Milly's return two years later, and a kindly doctor had been found to say that to leave India was the only chance for her. But it was the petty cruelty of Lord Newminster, not the heat, which was in reality the cause of her breakdown, and by the time the voyage had ended she was almost herself again.

Irene had hoped for a *tête-à-tête* luncheon when, as had been arranged, she went to Beauchamp Place. She was a little sorry to learn

that Milly had invited Mr. and Mrs. Ambrose Bray to meet her.

"I should like you to see him, he is such an interesting man," Lady Newminster explained. "I knew him when I was quite a little girl, and he—a young Oxonian then—used to take me out riding. Quite by chance we met on the steamer coming home; he had just given up his Indian appointment, because of his wife's health. Poor little wretch! she was ill the whole way home and looked a perfect object when we landed."

Irene thought there were all the materials for a tragedy in the appearance of the two guests who were at that moment announced. The shrinking, pale-faced little wife bore evident marks of suffering in her face: prematurely aged by Indian life and ill-health, it was piteous to see the effort she made to retain a girlish figure

and manner; and her hair, dyed a bright golden colour, contrasted painfully with her thin wan face, from which no system of massage would obliterate the lines.

Ambrose Bray, on the contrary, had grown stout and ruddy and choleric.

Possibly to Milly the recollection of her happy and untrammelled childish days threw a sort of halo over all connected with them; otherwise it was difficult to see what she found to attract her in this rather bumptious and overbearing man. All that could be said for him was that he was a great talker and that he evidently admired and liked her. Perhaps after her bitter experience of the cold manner and refined cruelty of Lord Newminster, she demanded in men nothing more than an absolute contrast to her husband.

"Well, what do you think of them?" ques-

tioned Lady Newminster, when, the guests having taken leave, she and her cousin were driving to the Tate Gallery.

"I think Mrs. Bray is a most pathetic little woman," said Irene. "She looks as if she had hardly the strength to cope with anyone so boisterous and talkative as her husband. Are there any children?"

"She lost two in India, and there is one little girl left—Guinevere—a horrid little spoilt creature who made herself a great nuisance on board. I think his marriage has been a mistake. I daresay it was well enough at first before she lost her looks, but now that she is such a wreck she must see that it's only natural for him to prefer to be with younger and more lively women."

"That's rather an odd way of loving and

cherishing her in sickness or in health, isn't it?" said Irene.

"Perhaps it is. But frankly, I can't get up much interest in Mrs. Bray. She seems to me such a silly woman. I believe the little goose is even jealous of me, and I'm sure without the least cause."

"How quaint and picturesque this part of London is!" exclaimed Irene, as, having passed Westminster, they drove down close to the river, and saw the busy lading and unlading going on by the quay. "Look at that golden corn on the boat, and the warehouses across the water, and those wheeling white pigeons! Oh! I am glad we came here. It's a delightful change from the smartness of the Park."

Milly was amused by her enthusiasm.

"How you do enjoy things!" she said. "You harrow yourself far more than other people over

the sad and the suffering, and yet, on the other hand, you enjoy like a child of seven—far more than Guinevere Bray, for instance, who is a little woman of the world at eight.”

But Milly herself found much to enjoy in the Gallery, and they spent two very happy hours there. It was on their way home that Irene learnt for the first time of a sorrow in her cousin's life, which no one had alluded to.

“How Luke Fildes's ‘Doctor’ haunts me!” said Lady Newminster, leaning back in the hansom with a tired sigh. “My doctor at Simla looked just like that the night Baby died. I shall always bless him for fighting so hard to save that little life. And afterwards, he cared far more than Baby's own father.”

“Oh, surely not?” said Irene wonderingly. “Some men can't show what they feel.”

“And others can't feel because they have

no room in their narrow hearts for anything but love of their own ambitions," said Milly, with indescribable bitterness. "Baby's death annoyed him because it interfered with some of his plans, and meant putting off guests and gaieties. Ever since that time I have hated him. He shall *never* have another child!"

Irene was silent; before this poor little outraged mother who would dare to speak? But instinctively she took one of Milly's restless white-gloved hands in her own quiet clasp, with that dumb sympathy which always contrives some mode of expression.

"You are a very restful person," said Milly, after awhile; "you make me think of that picture we liked just now. I could fancy I was lying down among those blue gentians and feeling the cool wind from the snow mountains in the background. Do you know,

now and then, when I remember how Mrs. Bray lost two children in Calcutta, I forgive her for being such a silly little woman, and feel a sort of liking for her. But she has really not much to complain of, for Ambrose after all does care for her, though she is so tiresome. I remember once seeing him quite angry because someone had disturbed her on board when she had a bad headache."

It was a relief after this glimpse of unhappiness to see something of Frank Warren's wife, whose marriage had proved so entirely satisfactory, and before Irene left London the two had formed a genuine friendship. Indeed, Victor Brooklin was inclined to grumble at the amount of time she spent in the rather dreary lodgings of the Lieutenant's wife.

"What with Milly's devotion to you and now this little Mrs. Warren, I never know

when you will be able to give me a sitting. See how slowly I get on with your portrait," he grumbled.

"But I have been here at least every other day," said Irene gaily. "You talk so much and paint so little when I do come."

"That's because I want to study your face under all conditions," he retorted. "This isn't to be a mere copy of one aspect of you, but a study of your whole character—and you have a very complex character."

"Milly, on the other hand, says she never met anyone so primitive and unsophisticated."

"Milly is a goose. Tell me about Mrs. Warren. How do you contrive to get on so well with the daughter of a colonel out in South Africa? Do you argue about peace and war?"

"Oh dear, no, we stitch harmoniously to-

gether at garments for the Boer women and children. Her father has told her what great need they are in, and how they suffer in the cold nights. The soldiers hate this awful work of devastation, but they have to obey orders. They do all they can privately to help the sufferers. It's the rich and ambitious people over here, and the ignorant and brutal lovers of war, who are indifferent to the awful pain and misery. I think the soldiers as a rule are kindly and warm-hearted. Some of them have given their own food to the victims of the war."

"I'll gladly give you mine to send to them; eating becomes daily more distasteful to me," said Victor, with a teasing glance at his model.

"Indeed I won't say 'No' to such an offer," she replied with spirit. "Give me the equivalent in money, and I will send it to the 'South African Women and Children Fund.'"

He took a 5*l.* note from his pocket-book and handed it to her with a smile. "Anonymously, from *One of the Hinderers*," he said, taking up his brushes again.

"No, no. From one of the Helpers," she said with a look that he tried to reproduce in the portrait, which daily became to him a more engrossing study.

CHAPTER VI.

Ah! little dream our listless eyes
What glorious presence they despise,
While, in our noon of life,
To power or fame we rudely press,—
Christ is at hand, to scorn or bless,
Christ suffers in our strife.

KEBLE.

MICHELHURST Manor, the Brooklins' country place, was one of the most picturesque houses in Southshire; an old Tudor mansion, admirably preserved, it was a constant source of delight to Victor Brooklin, and his haggard face lighted up when one December day he drove through the well-timbered park and saw the long low grey building with its oriel windows and moss-grown tiled roof, its battlemented tower at the south corner, and its air of perfect tranquillity. On his companion Hal, a small schoolboy who

looked much less than his thirteen years, the sight of the Manor produced pleasant but quite different impressions.

"How beastly quiet it looks!" he exclaimed. "I suppose all the men are out shooting. Hallo! There's Henderson," and he waved his hand in friendly fashion to the old butler.

Henderson explained that Mrs. Brooklin had driven to Malsbury, and that the Squire was out shooting with Mr. Beissmann and Mr. Coldwell. He believed Miss de St. Croix was in the picture-gallery.

"I say, Henderson, I'm awfully hungry; can't you get us something before the rest come in?" said Hal, with a vivid remembrance of drawing-room teas, when hungry schoolboys never could get enough to eat.

"Why, yes, Master Harry; where would you like to have it?"

"In the hall, by the fire," said Hal. "And a jolly lot of toast, Henderson—oh!" he broke off abruptly and coloured up, for at that moment a musical laugh made him glance towards the hearth, and he saw a slim figure in a soft bluish-grey dress, exactly matching the clear smiling eyes which met his in frank genial greeting.

"I have heard so much about you from Milly," said Irene, shaking hands with him, "that I seem to know you already—you must be dreadfully hungry after such a cold journey. And as to you, Victor, you look still more in need of tea."

She sat down again in the ingle-nook as the best means of getting the invalid to occupy the easy chair beside her, for it needed only a glance to assure her that her cousin was far more ill than when she had last seen him.

"You won't mind if we feed here?" said Hal politely.

"I was looking forward to a first innings with you," she said, "for the others won't be home yet for some time."

Hal regarded her with much favour, and when a sound of distant scratching and whining made her cross the hall to the entrance to the long room running from front to back of the building and known as the gallery, he seized opportunity to remark to Victor:

"I say, she's awfully decent, isn't she?"

Victor nodded, with a twinkle of amusement in his sunken eyes.

"So's the dog," he said, glancing at the fox terrier who, released from solitary confinement in the gallery, came bounding and leaping after his mistress.

"This is Dan Leno," said Irene. "Give your new cousin a paw, Dan."

"How I do wish it were the real one!" said

Hal fervently. "It's my greatest wish in the world to see him."

"Why, that is an easily granted wish, surely," said Irene, looking with friendly eyes at the eager face. "I want to see him too—we had better go together."

"To Drury Lane? You don't really mean it?"

"Yes I do, if your father and mother will spare you. I'm rather old to go to my first pantomime," she said, laughing, "but of course in Espaniere there was no chance."

"They'll spare me fast enough," said Hal with emphasis. "Why, they're always thankful when there's anything for me to do in the holidays. But I know mother is sure to be having a houseful of people, and you won't care to come then."

"Oh yes, I shall," said Irene. "This will be a previous engagement, and to-morrow we will fix a day and write for tickets."

Hal's eyes danced, and he rushed off to impart the good news to old Henderson, his great ally.

"You have made one person happy," said Victor. "But nevertheless you are not very happy yourself—you look downright ill."

"People in glass houses shouldn't throw stones," said Irene. "I was just going to ask what had happened to you this autumn."

"We'll come to that presently; don't evade the question. What is wrong?"

"Many things. For instance, I naturally feel the cold."

"The moral cold you mean. Wintry weather doesn't bring little lines round the mouth and sorrow into the eyes."

"Indeed, I think the times are out of joint," said Irene with a sigh. "And many people are sad at heart just now."

"They were nearly as bad when I last saw you, yet you kept a good heart then."

Her eyes suddenly filled with tears. She took up her work and sewed in silence for a minute.

"I can guess pretty well what has happened. You found the visit to the Fitzalbans an eye-opener."

"I don't want to speak against them. Many of the other houses we stayed at were just the same, and Cousin Henry and Mrs. Brooklin had arranged it all very kindly, thinking that I should enjoy it."

"And you didn't?"

"I hated it!" she said with an emphasis that startled Victor. He glanced at her, caught the flash of indignation in the blue-grey eyes usually so tender, and saw the colour tint her pale face. She had never looked more beautiful, but the

thought of the pain that had caused the change in her gave him a curious pang.

"You were at Hazelcourt, and Allaclere, and with the Garnet-Allingtons, were you not? Someone ought to have told you they were not in your line. A fast lot. You needn't tell me a word about it. I know the people and their ways. If you wouldn't play bridge for high stakes all the seven days of the week, they looked patronising and dubbed you a Puritan. If you ventured to say a word in favour of peace and conciliation in South Africa, they looked angry and dubbed you traitor and pro-Boer. And if you wouldn't take the usual tone of easy indifference and condone the tricks that you knew were being played with the seventh commandment, they sneered and dubbed you a prude."

He had precisely described what she had gone through that autumn. Her lips quivered for a minute.

"It was so dreadfully lonely," she said, and the pathos of her tone stirred his heart strangely.

"You dear little cousin!" he said. "If you had not been as true as steel and as brave as Joan the Maid, you would have gone the way of the rest of the world."

"I thought of what your old head-master quoted about not expecting the lee side or the sunny side of the brae. The worst was that it seemed all of no use, and yet that it was somehow right to struggle on against the wind. But you have cheered me up wonderfully. Now enough about my troubles. Tell me about yourself. Was the journey too much for you?"

"No, but I'm a poor tool now. It's no good beating about the bush—the long and the short of it is that the doctors give me six months."

Irene gave a stifled exclamation; they had all known that Victor's hold on life was precarious, but to hear him calmly quoting this sentence of death gave her a painful shock.

"They often make mistakes," she pleaded.

But Victor shook his head. "I said so myself when two had told me that same tale. But when seven of the leading doctors in London agreed in their verdict, I didn't see the good of worrying any more about it. One feels rather like a condemned criminal, and, as the moralists would observe, that is a very suitable sensation for a ne'er-do-weel like myself. Why, Irene!" he added, looking at her rather wistfully, "I believe you are sorry."

She kept back her tears by an effort, but could not speak; instead she slipped her hand into his for a minute.

"I am going to ask you a great favour," he

said. "I lived the ordinary life of a man about town till I met you in the summer. But you and old Beresford made me believe in—in better things. Will you let me see as much of you as reasonably can be managed in these six months that are left?"

"Yes, yes," she replied with eagerness. "We are friends as well as kinsfolk. Oh, I don't believe you, being a man, can understand how I have longed to have someone to nurse and care for. And your painting—you will still be able to enjoy that, and you will still teach me, will you not? I have been stumbling on alone as well as I could, and to-morrow you shall criticise my Scotch sketches, and show me what you have done. Here comes the tea in good time. I am not going to allow you to talk any more till you have had some."

Hal and Dan both put in an appearance

directly the toast was brought, and the boy chattered away happily, quite adopting Irene as a sister in the place of Milly.

"Milly is to be here to-morrow," she remarked; "we are to be quite a large party. Lord and Lady Fitzalban and their daughter come on Saturday, and there will be Mr. and Mrs. Ambrose Bray, besides the people who are already here."

"I hope that silly little Bray kid isn't coming," said Hal, making semicircular inroads on his second slice of toast. "They make such an idiotic fuss over her, and teach her such rotten songs. Then she's dressed up and made to sing whether we want to hear her or not. We had an awful dose of her in September at Scarborough, when I stayed with Milly."

"I rather think she is coming," said Irene. "But a child in the house at Christmas is always nice."

"Not that one," said Hal with conviction. Then, relapsing into enjoyment of the present, "I say, did you ever notice how awfully good hot buttered toast smells? It's quite my favourite smell."

"And mine—next to hot sealing-wax. I always envy the officials who make those huge red seals."

Just as Hal's hunger had been appeased there were sounds of carriage-wheels without, and he ran off to greet his mother. The Squire, too, returned after a long day's shooting and lingered for a few minutes to discuss with his wife a letter which had come by the second post.

"It is a letter from Sir Christopher Hope, my dear. Here, Irene, it concerns you as well. I had better read it."

"DEAR BROOKLIN,—I have been obliged to leave your kind inquiries unanswered for some

time, but am at length recovered and allowed to return again to England. It is very good of you to ask me down to Michelhurst. I should enjoy nothing more than a visit to my dear old home, and am anxious to meet Sir George de St. Croix's granddaughter and talk over the various arrangements which you mention in regard to our trusteeship. Pray express to her my regrets that my own illness and the illness and death of my mother in the autumn have made it impossible for me to see her earlier. My mother had looked forward to inviting her to stay with us at Mentone, and one of our last talks related to Miss de St. Croix. I am speaking on Saturday at Kingsdale. Would it be convenient to you and Mrs. Brooklin if I came to Michelhurst on Monday the 23rd inst.?

“Yours faithfully,

“CHRISTOPHER HOPE.”

"How very annoying!" said Mrs. Brooklin. "Such a man will never fit in with our house-party. These random invitations of yours, Henry, are always getting me into difficulties."

"I was bound to ask him, my dear," said the Squire. "It is high time I saw about Irene's affairs, and besides you forget that he's an old school-friend of mine."

"Because you were boys together, it does not follow that you are to be hampered now with a man who has taken a most unpopular line. Why, he's a regular pro-Boer, and will be at daggers drawn with men like Mr. Beissmann and Mr. Coldwell."

"Don't trouble about them," said the Squire with a chuckle; "Beissmann is nothing but a walking money-bag, and Coldwell is blessed with the thick skin essential to a South African

capitalist. To hear his callous account of the Chartered Company's treatment of the natives in the Matabele war almost turns me into one of Irene's Quakers."

Mrs. Brooklin laughed and shrugged her shoulders.

"If you turn into anything so unfashionable and obsolete, I give you fair warning I shall leave. Irene will soon learn that life's not worth living if you are not smart and up to date."

"What does Sir Christopher mean about his old home?" asked Irene. "Did he live in this neighbourhood?"

"In this very house," said the Squire. "But the estate was heavily mortgaged and his father had great losses; so that when some twenty years ago Hope inherited the property, he thought it better to sell the place. His mother was in failing health, too, and preferred to be

with him in London. There never was a better son; what with his mother and his literary work and his parliamentary career, I believe the poor fellow never had time to live his own life. And here he is now, a couple of years older than I am—a lonely old bachelor of sixty.”

“You were at school together?”

“Yes, we were both Queen’s scholars at Westminster. I was a duffer, but Hope was always a clever fellow. I remember, as if it were yesterday, how when I was but a lad of sixteen he inveigled me into the House of Commons to hear a debate—you know the Westminster boys have certain privileges in that way—and Hope was always the keenest to get admission. I recollect we heard John Bright, and Hope was bitten even then with his suggestion that instead of spending the national substance in armaments, we should attempt to persuade France to trade freely

with us. Lord! how time passes! Why, that must have been in 1859!"

Irene had looked forward to Milly's arrival; they had not met since the summer, and Lady Newminster had proved a bad correspondent. She had much to tell of the visits she had paid, and it soon became evident that the Brays had been constantly crossing her path.

"Ambrose is my factotum," she remarked calmly, when the first evening she lingered in Irene's bedroom before bidding her good-night. "You see in some matters one needs a man's advice, and he is very shrewd in many ways."

When on the Saturday the Brays arrived, Irene began to have uncomfortable doubts whether Mrs. Bray quite approved of the way in which her husband hung about Lady Newminster. Her wan smile looked even more

piteous and artificial than in the summer, and her dyed golden hair contrasted almost grotesquely with her haggard face. Nor was she an easy person to help; for having discovered that Irene was not in Mrs. Brooklin's good books, and was regarded by Lady Fitzalban as a peculiar and contemptible girl, who cherished absurd prejudices against betting, gambling, and other Society customs, she steadily repulsed all friendly advances, fearing to offend the others if she fraternised with one who had taken an unpopular line.

On the Monday it chanced that the atmosphere of the Manor was peculiarly trying. A sharp frost had stopped the hunting, and the men were inclined to be moody. By the time the daylight had faded and it became impossible for Victor and Irene to paint any longer in the gallery, the rest of the party had gathered in the

drawing-room, where, amid the plaudits of the hard and critical group, little Guinevere Bray, dressed as Carmencita, sang, with a mouse-like voice but a most pitiful parody of the gestures and expression of a well-known actress, certain songs from the "Runaway Girl." Her silly little mother proudly accompanied her on the piano, and it was impossible to conceive anything more utterly unchildlike than Guinevere's rendering of

Oh! I love Society! High Society! High Society!
I should be called an attractive girl
If my papa was a noble Hearl!

"What silly rot!" commented Hal in a low tone, as he gave up his chair to Irene.

"How do you like the book?" she asked, glancing at a copy of "With Edged Tools" which she had lent him.

"It's ripping," he said. "I never read one

of Merriman's before. Jove! he can write, that fellow!"

"Any news?" asked the Squire, listlessly picking up one of the papers.

"Nothing much to-day but Hope's great speech at Kingsdale," observed Mr. Beissmann, a stout florid man with an unmistakably Jewish nose. "If he's going to stump the country speech-making, there'll be the devil to pay. I wish such unpatriotic doctrinaires could be shut up in Bedlam."

"Let off the steam before he arrives," suggested Victor dryly, while Irene felt the blood tingle in her veins at the insolence with which this German Jew dared to call in question Sir Christopher's love for his country.

Unluckily the Squire's innocent remark had started the topic of the great demonstration at Kingsdale; and with the exception of Ambrose

Bray, who flirted with Milly in the farthest of the oriel windows, and of Mrs. Bray, who silently watched their proceedings from her place by the hearth, everyone began to pick the speech to pieces and to pour contempt on the speaker.

Irene kept silence, but it was clearly not the silence of approval or of indifference.

"Miss de St. Croix does not agree with us," said Lady Fitzalban with a laugh.

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Beissmann, her thin lips forming into an insolent sneer. "She evidently sides with the man who criticises his own country and extols the enemy."

She had some discernment and had learnt from experience that, whereas personal attacks on this "sentimental faddist," as she was in the habit of describing Irene, always fell flat, the girl would now and then fire up at an attack on

other people, or on matters in which principle was involved.

Clearly Miss de St. Croix was roused now, for there was a sudden flash of light in her quiet eyes.

"I side with the man whose speech rings true—who is fearlessly honest though it were to his own hindrance," she said, with the force of one who speaks straight from the heart. "Sir Christopher Hope is my ideal of a patriot, one who would save his country from following false lights, one who loves real greatness, not mere material gain. Isn't it plain from his speech that he only wishes England to do justly and love mercy, and to clear herself of the boastful aggressiveness and pride which are dragging her down?"

"My dear," said Lady Fitzalban, with a patronising smile, "you surely don't think we

were any of us at the pains to read the speech? Do you mean to say you waded through four columns? Life is not long enough. Take my advice! Skim the leading article in the 'Hour,' and you will be much better able to take an intelligent share in conversation, and will have time to enjoy yourself over games and flirtations, and frocks and furbelows, like the rest of the world."

"Oh! but Miss de St. Croix, from her lofty pedestal, despises all frivolities of that kind," said Mrs. Beissmann, with the covert sneer in which some women are such adepts.

Irene coloured, but the next moment she forgot the insolence in the interest of watching Hal.

The small schoolboy, with a kindling of the blue-grey eyes which made her think of her grandfather when something had roused him,

wriggled out of his chair to set down her empty tea-cup, exclaiming as he did so,

"Why, Irene's a 'dook' at ping-pong. No one in the house can beat her. I do wish you'd come and play with me now," he added, turning to her with an old-world gallantry which delighted the Squire.

"Bravo Hal!" he muttered, with a sense of pride in his son which led him to reflect uneasily why it was that he tolerated these visitors at the Manor. How amazed his parents would have been could they have foreseen that his guests would ever be a couple of unscrupulous speculators like Coldwell and Beissmann!

"Well, well!" he mused, "times are changed, and nowadays wealth is the great thing—besides they have both been extremely useful to me."

Could he have had a glimpse of John

Coldwell's mind as the speculator yawned behind his newspaper, he would have seen that the guest was reflecting, "What an incorrigible old bore the Squire is! But I must humour him and stay on in this dull hole a little longer, for I mean him to be of great use to us."

CHAPTER VII.

and carrying themselves with an air of conscious importance, that he could scarcely believe that the slightly built figure in a dark-grey bicycling suit could indeed be the noted statesman. While he hesitated for a moment the old station-master hurried forward.

"Glad to have you with us again, Sir Christopher," he said.

"What, Barker! I am glad to find an old friend here," said the new-comer with a hearty shake of the hand.

James relieved him of his rug and travelling-bag, and inquired about luggage.

"A portmanteau and a bicycle," said Sir Christopher, and he arranged to cycle along the well-known road to his old home, but lingered for some time after the carriage had started that he might chat over old times with the station-master.

The night was fine and frosty, and the stars shone out gloriously in the purple sky. Sir Christopher, as he cycled over the hard ground, felt younger and fresher than he had done since his illness and the sorrow of the autumn.

How unchanged old Barker had been — how familiar and unaltered was every bend of the road! After all, at sixty, spite of trouble and care, he was conscious of an unfailing spring of youth and vigour within him. As he rode he glanced every now and then to his right, watching for a certain gap in the woods through which in old times the Manor could be seen. Yes! there it was at length, and the lights in the windows shone out into the night just as they had done in the past. He sighed a little and his thoughts' went back to the long illness and death of his father, and further

back to the sister who had been his friend and companion—little Meg, whose lover had been killed in an obscure skirmish on the Indian frontier, and who had never recovered from the shock of the news but had slowly faded away.

He was suddenly brought back to the present by the collapse of one of his tyres, and dismounting found that the puncture was serious.

“I’ll leave it at the lodge with Mallinder,” he reflected, pushing the machine along the frosty road; and the lodge-keeper proved to be on the watch for him, having learnt from the coachman that he had declined to drive.

“Welcome to you, Sir Christopher,” said the old man heartily. “It will be Christmas indeed for all of us now that you’ve come here again. We’ve been reading of the grand reception they gev you, ‘sir, at Kingsdale, and lor, sir, I feel

twice the man I did since reading your speech. That's what we want, sir, honest men as will deal straight; we're sick to death of swagger and bloodshed."

"Glad you approved of the speech, Mal-linder," said Sir Christopher. "Unless we hold fast to our old principles of peace, retrenchment, and reform, we're a doomed country. Can I leave the bicycle here? The front tyre is badly punctured; I'll come down to-morrow and see about it."

"Aye sir, do," said the gatekeeper; "but don't you fash yourself about the tyre. I'll see to that, and we'll be proud to welcome you if you'll call in. We was but saying now how we wished the place was still in your hands, sir."

Perhaps the same feeling stole into Sir Christopher's heart as he walked through the park and drew nearer to his old home. A

group of carol-singers stood in front of the house just in the patch of light which came from the oriel window in the hall, and the words floated towards him, bringing with them an extraordinary sense that the past Christmas-tides were still his:

Yet with the woes of sin and strife
The world has suffered long;
Beneath the Angel-strain have rolled
Two thousand years of wrong:
And man, at war with man, hears not
The words of peace they bring:—
Oh! listen now, ye men of strife,
And hear the angels sing!

Oh Prince of Peace, Thou knowest well
This weary world below,
Thou seest how men climb the way
With painful steps and slow.
Oh! still the jarring sounds of earth
That round the pathway ring,
And bid the toilers rest awhile
To hear the angels sing.

As he approached, Sir Christopher's eyes were not on the carol-singers but on an open window near the south tower. That had been Meg's room, and now he was startled to see there a girl's figure wrapped in something white and fleecy; the light in the room behind made a sort of golden aureole of her hair—her features he could not at that distance see. Instinctively his steps slackened as he saw the girl lean out and throw some coins in the direction of the singers. They fell far short of the group, for like most women she threw badly; moreover, the village minstrels were entirely absorbed in their own efforts, and did not notice this gift from an unexpected quarter. Sir Christopher, whose keen eyes had noted the place where the coins fell, hurried forward and gathered them up, involuntarily raised his hat to the unknown giver, and handed over the money to the

throaty tenor, effectually checking him just as he was slurring up for his favourite high note in the last line.

The next minute the front-door was thrown open and Sir Christopher was ushered into what seemed to him a new world, for although the outer walls of the Manor were still home-like, within all was transformed. The flagged floor had been abolished, and he stepped uncomfortably from slippery parquet to priceless Persian rugs; hot-water pipes warmed the once chilly atmosphere, while the log fire had become merely an ornamental appendage, and the hard brilliancy of the electric light fell with incongruous force on the old oil-paintings and the Tudor panelling. It was all very luxurious, but the charm of the place had somehow vanished.

It was not only the electric light that

seemed such a glaring anachronism: the sleek dapper John Coldwell, with his cynical mouth and his stony eyes, seemed even more out of place; while Miss Fitzalban, clad in bright red frieze, lounging back in an easy chair with a cigarette between her lips, and her feet in patent leather shoes and embroidered stockings thrust halfway across the hearthrug, was a vision which would have horrified all former occupants of the place.

The Squire's greeting, however, was genial and pleasant, and the two old school-friends soon fell into comfortable talk, the guest being carried off to his room to dress for dinner. While on the way the host could not resist pointing out the improvements which were the main interest of his life.

"I never knew before how much latent conservatism lurked within me," mused Sir Chris-

topher, when he found himself alone. It's a mistake to come back to one's old haunts after so many years."

He sighed as he glanced at the pile of letters awaiting him on the writing-table, and, hastily dressing, began to answer the more important ones before going down to the drawing-room.

"I wonder who my lady of the casement is," he reflected making his way down the familiar staircase. "Possibly Brooklin's daughter, Lady Newminster; he said she was here."

In the hall he encountered Hal, who had already been presented to him by the Squire. "Perhaps you can tell me if the post has yet gone, and where to put these letters," he said, looking with interest at the schoolboy's frank rosy face, which was curiously like that of his father in the old times at Westminster. He had

a way of always treating children like reasonable beings, and they invariably liked him.

"The letters will go at eight from this box by the conservatory," said Hal.

"The conservatory is new since my time," said Sir Christopher, as Hal drew aside a heavy curtain and threw back the glass-door.

"It leads right along to the further side of the drawing-room," explained the boy. "I'm just waiting about to get hold of Irene before she goes in. I want her to wear these violets which I've worried out of Sykes the gardener. Aren't they hefty ones? See how well they stand up!"

"They are beautiful—the finest I ever saw," said Sir Christopher, smiling at the thought of "hefty" violets. "You are fond of your cousin, I see."

"Rather!" said Hal. "She's a brick; and

the old cats in there lead her such a life. But, you know, though she's awfully gentle, she's like these violets, she can stand up to them like anything."

Sir Christopher thought it wise not to inquire who "the old cats" were. "Why do they lead her a life?" he asked, strolling slowly through the conservatory.

"Well, they don't like it because she doesn't follow their lead, and they call her unpatriotic because she won't rejoice over the slaughter of Boers. You see she can't, because she thinks war wrong. And she won't bet or play for money because *she* thinks that unpatriotic, and says if people love England they shouldn't take part in what is ruining the country."

Sir Christopher looked at the frank, eager face with its great possibilities.

"Depend upon it, Hal, she is the sort of

patriot we need nowadays," he said, with an earnestness that impressed the boy.

"I think Irene is a jolly lot better than anyone I ever knew," said Hal; "and Victor says she's the most plucky girl he has seen, and that means a lot from him, because he doesn't praise people. You see—she's so straight; and besides, she always seems to know just what a fellow wants. Here she comes!" and he darted to the entrance.

Sir Christopher looked back through the flowery vista, and once more saw his lady of the casement. The hanging lamps among the palms and tree-ferns shone on the soft folds of her white silk dress, on the snowy chiffon about her white throat and neck, and on the masses of golden-brown hair which framed a face of Saxon outline. The Saxon element must have been on her mother's side, for the very

dark blue-grey eyes and the delicately pencilled dark eyebrows reminded him that the St. Croix family were of Huguenot origin.

He waited until the violets had been duly praised and fastened in the billowy white chiffon, then moved towards her, while Hal, with his quaint little touch of old-world courtesy, formally introduced them.

"You were the first to greet me as I came back to my old home," said Sir Christopher, with a glad sense that somehow she had renewed his youth. "I saw you listening to the carol-singers."

"And you kindly retrieved my very bad throw," said Irene, smiling. "I had never heard carol-singing before, and it seemed to me like a bit of Charles Dickens, to look out on the group standing on the frosty ground, with their lanterns and their fiddles."

"I took it as a good omen that a vision of peace and a prayer for peace should welcome me," said Sir Christopher, chafing like a boy when the clock in the hall struck eight and reminded him that they must not linger in this fairy-land, but go into the prosaic drawing-room, whence a roar of conversation reached them. He hoped that he might have the pleasure of taking her in to dinner; but alas! his sixty years and his position robbed him of such a chance. He found that Lady Newminster was to be his fate, and that he was placed at the left of the hostess, with Lord Fitzalban and Mrs. Bray facing him, while Irene de St. Croix was midway down the opposite side, looking strangely out of harmony with the florid and fat Mr. Beissmann on her left, and on her right the young Vicar of the parish, Mr. Ponting, a self-satisfied and important young

man of nine-and-twenty, with a narrow receding forehead and a supercilious manner which made the member for Northwall long to kick him.

Mrs. Brooklin had taken good care to avoid all difficult topics with the new-comer, but it chanced that halfway through dinner one of those strange pauses in the talk occurred when, as the saying goes, an angel is passing. The Vicar, absorbed in his subject, did not notice the sudden ebb in the tide of conversation; in the stillness his strident voice was only too audible.

"And I hear you actually send out *good* clothes to those wicked Boers," he remarked.

Irene could not help laughing a little.

"Only good ones would be worth the carriage," she said, glad to hear that the talk had become general again.

Mrs. Brooklin glanced with a smile at Sir Christopher.

"I fear the Vicar, being very patriotic, will be shocked with Miss de St. Croix's notions."

"I should fancy his patriotism is of the sort which waves a union jack and shouts 'Rule Britannia' in the intervals of throwing stones and abuse at those who disapprove of the war," said Sir Christopher dryly.

"But Miss de St. Croix is a dreadful pro-Boer," said Mrs. Brooklin.

Sir Christopher smiled with imperturbable good-humour.

"Everyone who ventures to disapprove the policy of our present Government has to put up with that sobriquet," he said. "As leagues seem in fashion just now, I really think of running one of my own; but the difficulty is to hit on a good title. 'The Anti-calling-other-people-names League' is descriptive, but over

long; and the 'Total Abolition of Abuse League' would require explanation."

"It would never answer," said Lady Newminster, laughing. "'Pro-Boer,' and 'Jingo,' and 'Little Englander,' and the rest, have become part of the English language, and have come to stay. I see that poor Irene has to endure a long tirade about the wickedness of 'those cowardly, canting Dutch,' as Mr. Ponting calls them. He is never tired of discoursing on their evil practices."

"Strange, isn't it, that the soldiers are as a rule generous and ready to see the good points of the foe, while the parsons who should be peace-makers, struggling to keep alive the tender humanity and compassion, the respect for the rights of man, and the love of gentleness and truth, which get blunted during a great war, are, with a few noble exceptions, so bellicose?"

"To tell the truth I am heartily tired of the war," said Lady Newminster. "At first it was exciting, but now I rarely trouble to look at the casualty lists. I am glad for Irene's sake that you have come, for she takes the whole thing to heart in an extraordinary way, and has an idea that England is on the down grade, treading the primrose path, and that sort of thing, and no doubt it's very true of many of us."

With a hard little laugh she turned to Ambrose Bray, who sat at her left, and Sir Christopher, seeing opposite him the miserable eyes of little Mrs. Bray glancing first at Lady Newminster, then at her husband, understood something of the tragedy that was going on. He felt, moreover, a sharp stab of pain at his own heart when it suddenly struck him that the last time he had dined in that room his

mother had sat in Mrs. Brooklin's place; for a moment it seemed to him he could actually see her with her smooth white hair and widow's cap, and the smile that had been sweeter than ever because grief had drawn the sore heart nearer to heaven. Then with a shock he came back to the present, to see Mrs. Brooklin there, painted, powdered, dyed, false from the smile with which she fawned upon Lord Fitzalban to the subtly flattering talk at which she was an adept; but very real in the magnificence of her velvet and lace, and in the costliness of the diamond necklace which rose and fell on her comely white neck at each breath she drew.

He looked away with a heart-sickness which he could not have put into words, and as his eyes wandered down the table they suddenly met a pair of dark eyes which, like his mother's, had grown deeper and sweeter through sorrow.

His pulses began to throb; why had he fancied that his life was practically ended? Why had he vaguely planned gradual retirement and a dryasdust existence in his study among his books? That could never satisfy him now—for love had all at once kindled its light within him, and the emptiness of the Manor which had so chilled him had vanished like a bad dream. He could almost have fancied that the old familiar faces were looking down well pleased to see that one whom they, too, would have loved and welcomed was here as a guest.

When the ladies left the dining-room Victor took Lady Newminster's vacant place, and before long his shrewd knowledge of the world, and his keen powers of observation had read the older man's heart like a book. The discovery left him thoughtful. The great difference in age was against Sir Christopher's chances; but, on the

other hand, there was an undeniable charm in his old-world manner, in his strong virile character, and in the undaunted honesty with which he confronted problems that many were disposed to shirk. He was the very opposite of the man in the "Biglow Papers" who announced,

I *don't* believe in princerple,
But oh, I *du* in interest!"

Might it not be for his pretty cousin's happiness to accept the love of such a one?"

He sighed a little as he wondered whether, should this match ever come off, Irene would have time to remember her promise to be as much with him as might be through the remaining months; then blamed himself for imagining for a moment that she would ever be false to a promise.

Sir Christopher, who quickly discovered other people's hobbies, was in the meanwhile talking of

Italian art, of studios he had seen in Rome, and of Victor's own work.

"I should like to show you a portrait I am now finishing," said Victor, as they left the dining-room; and switching on the electric light in the picture-gallery, he uncovered a canvas which stood on the easel. Sir Christopher gazed in silence at the painting of Irene. It was a half-length; the girl wore a white Greek dress, and held clasped to her breast a dove; her bright hair looked like a halo against the dusky background of olive-branches. "We call it 'Peace and Concord,'" said the artist with a smile. "But Concord, the dove, is a fraud, and is constantly quarrelling with its mate," and he glanced at the wicker cage where two ringdoves sat solemnly on their perch.

"How wonderfully you have caught Miss de St. Croix's expression!" said Sir Christopher.

"Most artists represent peace as a sort of calm and bovine contentment and indifference—but peace must be learnt first in rough waters: you don't find it in the eyes of the baby, but in the eyes that have shed heartbroken tears."

"Irene is one of a thousand," said Victor. "She is firmly persuaded that she has done nothing since she came to England, but there are many of us who could tell you that her view of the matter is far from the truth. She is a little saint, but not at all on conventional lines, and unclaimed by any party in the Church."

"That's a mercy," said Sir Christopher. "Her free soul should never be cabined, cribbed, confined in the bondage of ecclesiastical systems. The party system is a necessity in the State, but seems to me intolerable in higher matters."

Victor paid no very great heed to the words; he had set his heart on helping to throw Irene

into frequent contact with the speaker, sure that her chief hope of a happy future lay in having such a man as her protector, and he was hurriedly casting about in his mind for some means to further this end.

"I wonder whether you will do me a favour," he said presently. "I am seized with a keen desire to make a study of your head. Will you give me a few sittings while you are here? It's my last chance, for I have only a six months' lease of life."

Sir Christopher looked at him with kindly concern.

"You are ill?"

"Yes. Heart mischief. No great pain except at intervals, and I may count myself a lucky dog, for my cousin Irene takes good care of me. She is in here a good deal copying that Corot near the fire."

Sir Christopher had been about to protest that sitting for his picture invariably made him fall asleep, but he shrank from refusing this dying man's request, and he reflected that if Irene were in the gallery he should have no difficulty in keeping awake.

In the drawing-room they found the card-tables out and most of the company settling down to bridge. Irene leaning back in the corner of a big Chesterfield sofa was vaguely watching the noisy groups, but her thoughts were far away in her old home, where there had been merriment and happiness, without this incongruous element of vulgarity and this oppressive atmosphere of latent evil. Suddenly with a sense of relief she felt that one in some way connected with her old life was drawing near; Sir Christopher was crossing the room in her direction, and she became aware that he

was infinitely more to her than any other man present.

"He is like Grandfather," she thought, not analysing the thrill that passed through her as she watched the slight alert-looking figure, and saw Sir Christopher pause with a little bow to speak a few words to Lady Newminster.

He was only of medium height, and his loose, silky, iron-grey hair was worn a little longer than fashion prescribed, clustering in short silvery waves about the well-developed forehead. The clean-shaven face was deeply lined, the somewhat long upper lip, straight firm mouth, and well-moulded chin bespoke great force of character, while the rather stern effect was mitigated by the delightful humour which lurked in the light-grey eyes. He invariably wore spectacles, but even these seemed

to have a character of their own, and to adapt themselves to the sagacity and alertness of the face.

"No"—Irene heard him say in his mellow, cheerful voice, as the Squire asked whether he would not play—"I now and then indulge in a quiet rubber, but I'm not a devotee of the new game, and would much prefer a talk with Miss de St. Croix. I want to hear of my old friend."

"To be sure," said the Squire heartily. "Come into the music-room; you have not seen the alterations we have made there. Irene, you will find Sir Christopher as fond of the old music as I am. It is such a comfort to have a girl in the house who will play. Nowadays, unless people can play or sing as well as a professional, there's no inducing them to do anything but criticise."

"The fact is they're more anxious to excel than to give pleasure," said Sir Christopher. "The same fault is spoiling even our games; you hardly ever meet people who play for the pleasure or the sociability of playing."

Irene, at the Squire's request, opened the piano and began a rondo of Weber's, while he drew Sir Christopher's attention to the various improvements in the room, especially to two Chippendale chairs for which, he related with a pleased smile, he had given a thousand guineas. The guest quietly sat down on one and thought it remarkably uncomfortable, while the host returned to his other visitors, and carried off the Vicar to play billiards.

"Thank-you," said Sir Christopher, when the rondo came to an end. "I shall know now where to turn when, in Saul's fashion, I need music to

drive away the melancholy and despondent blue devils!"

"I don't think you are much like Saul," said Irene, smiling. "On the contrary, it is you who have cheered all the despondent people in England by your speech on Saturday. I feel as if, like Elijah, I could go in the strength of that meat many days."

His eyes kindled with a look of unmistakable pleasure at her words.

"For a man who has been abused like a pickpocket to-day in most of the newspapers, it is good to hear a comrade's voice saying such a thing as that," he said. "I have learnt a little about you from your cousin Mr. Brooklin, and from your little knight, Hal. You, like all lovers of justice and legality, are heavy-hearted at the intolerable state of things in South Africa."

"I don't understand the laughing, careless way in which people discuss the whole subject," said Irene. "The thought of these barbarous executions, and the abominable cruelty of forcing the innocent friends to go and witness them, makes my blood boil! And to think that we are responsible—that we are actually paying to help on this hateful war, covers one with shame. One would like to refuse to pay—and suffer for it, like John Hampden; or go out there and help the sick and wounded under the neutral sign of the Red Cross."

"You are like

Falkland, heartsick of his country's shame,"

said Sir Christopher, watching the speaker's beautiful eyes, as deep feeling made them clear windows for the true and justice-loving soul within to shine forth. "But there is better work for you here in England, where every

brave man or woman who loves this country and seeks the good of the human race will have to speak out boldly, cost what it may, against the false doctrine of materialism and force, and against the craven spirit of opportunism."

"That was one thing that cheered me so much in your speech; you seemed to think that we are not so hopelessly in the minority."

"I think, like Elijah, you are tired and lonely, but that there are indeed many thousands of our countrymen left who have not bowed to Mammon and Mars—euphoniously known nowadays by the ill-omened name of 'Imperialism.' People little think how beneath the frothy fulminations of the war-press the heart of the nation is true to the old traditions, and you and all who have the courage of their convictions can do much simply by speaking out, and so helping others to protest."

"I seem to have done nothing but wait all this year," said Irene. "When we left London in the summer I had, however, a very pleasant visit to one of the big Quaker families, the Ashmounts, who have property in Espaniere. I felt somehow at home among them. It was there I had the chance of hearing at first hand about the Concentration Camps, but literally the only place in which the speaker could find safe shelter was the Friends' Meeting House, though the speech was not political and all the work had been philanthropic. It seemed impossible to believe that I was in England, the home of free speech."

"Indeed, it has not been of late .

The land where girt with friends or foes

A man may speak the thing he will,"

said Sir Christopher. "But war always lets loose the worst passions. It was the same

in the Crimean days, when that grand old Quaker, John Bright, protested against the war and was called "traitor" and "Russian," and spat upon in the streets. Yet everyone now acknowledges that the Crimean war was a blunder."

"The whole tone of the Ashmounts seemed to me noble," said Irene. "They were so firm and true to their peace principles. Though earlier in the war their houses up in Northshire had been mobbed and seriously damaged, and their very lives endangered by ruffians who would not allow a word to be said by those who knew the true state of things in South Africa, they were quite without bitterness, and would not even compel the town to make good the damage done."

"Yes; they set a fine example there," said Sir Christopher. "As you know, I believe that

had Englishmen been true to their best traditions, this war would never have been. I do not, however, think wars of defence can as yet *invariably* be avoided, but they should never be carried further than mere defence. Unluckily, as Sydney Smith observed, it is terribly easy to persuade ourselves that it is our duty to shed human blood—and that the decision has cost us a severe struggle. In all ages ‘wounds and shrieks and tears have been the cheap and vulgar resources of the rulers of mankind.’”

“The Quaker position seems to me the only Christlike one,” said Irene.

“There is no doubt that the Quakers have throughout their existence been the advance-guard of Christianity,” said Sir Christopher. “Before long I believe all nations will own that the barbarous remedy of brute force is as little to be

defended as the method of the 'lock-out' or the 'strike,' and all sensible and sane people will insist on the reasonable method of arbitration. Which of the Ashmounts did you stay with—the member for Hillborough?"

"Yes. Such a fine old man. He only once alluded to the losses and injuries and the discourtesy they had to bear, and then it was to check me when I said something hot and hasty about the attack. He looked up in his quiet fashion and said, 'Never mind the wrecked property; that is a passing discomfort. The lasting part is the honour that has come to us in being called upon to witness in this way.'"

"A pity that a little of John Ashmount's Christianity cannot be instilled into your neighbour at dinner," said Sir Christopher, with a humorous gleam in his eyes. "That sapient remark

about the 'good clothes' sent out to those wicked Boers ought to be sent to 'Punch.' There used to be such a dear old vicar here—it is hard to find in his place this bumptious and war-like youth. He makes me think of the lines on a young parson

Snatch'd immature from academic bowers,
To dress up truth in artificial flowers.

I have a bad trick of playing a new version of our old game of capping verses, and fitting the people I come across with the rhymes that seem to belong to them. Your other neighbour with the Jewish nose suggested to me Lowell's 'Pious Editor':

It ain't by princerples nor men
My prudent course is steadied,
I scent which pays the best and then
Go into it baldheaded.

But I am getting scurrilous—you must soothe

me with music. I see you have Beethoven there—might we have the Moonlight Sonata?"

"I am glad you chose that," said Irene. "It was my grandfather's favourite; I shall feel as if I were playing it at home once more. I don't know how it is, but you remind me so much of grandfather."

"Poor Sir Christopher!" thought Victor as he strolled into the music-room and heard the remark. "That was rather a nasty one for you!"

CHAPTER VIII.

Our creed is this: "Twere better starve
Than live by others' loss or dole,
And better fail than pathway carve
Through fraud and wrong to wished-for goal;
That soon or late the right shall win,
The weak grow strong, the mighty fall,
The wicked perish in their sin,
The wronged on God not vainly call."

FRANCIS A. FAHY.

THE frost still held on Christmas Eve and made hunting impossible, but the Squire and most of the men of the party got ready to go out shooting, accompanied, rather against their secret desires, by Miss Fitzalban in a khaki-coloured skirt, kilted just below the knee and displaying an unsightly length of gaitered leg and stout boots. With her gun in her hand, and her hard face looking all the less womanly

for the hard felt hat surmounting it, she made Sir Christopher beat a hasty retreat from the hall—for of all things he detested a masculine woman.

As he went up the stairs the Squire's voice reached him, and on turning the corner by the landing-window he saw the dejected face of Hal, and the Squire's broad back bending over his son and heir that he might the better read an open letter in the boy's hand.

"I would go with you myself if I could leave my guests, but you see how it is, Sonnie."

"Can I do anything for you?" asked Sir Christopher. "What's amiss with my friend Hal?"

"You're very kind, Hope," said the Squire. "I was only telling him that it's impossible he and Miss de St. Croix should go alone to Drury Lane on Boxing Day."

"And we can't get tickets for ever so long after that," said Hal, in a deeply dejected voice. "We have had a letter to say that three stalls for the afternoon performance on Boxing Day have been returned, and I thought perhaps father would have gone too."

"It's out of the question, lad. I'm sorry for you," said the Squire.

"Let me go with them," said Sir Christopher. "I'll see that they come to no harm."

"Oh! my dear fellow, don't you trouble," said the Squire. "You have far too much on you, I am sure, to be bothered with a small schoolboy and a pantomime."

"I assure you I should like nothing better if Miss de St. Croix will have me as an escort. Come, Hal! we will find her, and then you can wire for these seats."

"Oh! thank-you, sir," said Hal, his face

beaming. "It's 'Bluebeard,' you know, and Dan Leno is to be Sister Anne. It's sure to be ripping!"

The Squire lingered for a minute to thank Sir Christopher.

"How well you always understood children, Hope!" he said, looking rather wistfully after Hal as he sprang down the staircase three steps at a time, and wishing in his heart that he could make a fourth and leave the far less congenial guests to shift for themselves.

"Why on earth do I have men like Coldwell and Beissmann here at all?" he thought to himself. "I wish to heaven I'd never met them or been persuaded to take shares in those cursed mines. If I'd stuck to my father's principles I shouldn't have put a penny in them."

Irene was already in the gallery chatting to Victor, as she arranged her easel and paint-

ing-things. Their talk had turned on Sir Christopher, for Victor, full of his project, loved to draw her out while she was still absolutely unconscious.

"I feel as if a bit of home had come into my life again," she said, with a happy light in her eyes. "I wish you could have heard all he said yesterday evening. There is something so true about him. One never loses sight of his strength or his simplicity."

"You would have felt that even more if you had been in the smoking-room last night," said Victor. "Coldwell told a loose story, and though two or three of us didn't like it, no one but Sir Christopher had the pluck to speak out. I shall never forget it. Nothing of the sort will ever be said again as long as he is here."

"Irene!" cried Hal, darting into the gallery, "it's all come right about the pantomime!

That old brick really wants to come; he's quite keen on it."

Sir Christopher joined them before more explanations could be made, and soon all was happily arranged to everyone's satisfaction; and Hal, in a transport of delight, was cycling to the telegraph-office, while Victor seized the opportunity of ensuring a first sitting from the member for Northwall.

That it was inevitably a sad Christmas Day for Irene and Sir Christopher, being for both of them the first since their bereavement, only seemed to draw them nearer to each other. Most of the ladies in the house attended church at eleven—as Mrs. Brooklin remarked it was "well to set an example in the country"—and the Squire and his old school-friend and Hal accompanied them.

But at the end of the sermon there was a

general putting on of boas, and the Manor party prepared to go out, leaving only Irene and Sir Christopher to receive the Holy Communion. Hal hesitated. He had been confirmed six months before at school, but had never at home ventured to take his own line in this matter. It was hard to stand alone, especially when it seemed, as he expressed it, to be setting up to be better than others. He grew hot, groped for his hat and brushed it with scrupulous care. Dared he stay? Yet somehow if he went out he knew that he should have proved himself a moral coward. He was sitting in the seat behind Irene, and at that moment she looked round, saw that he was pausing, and with a smile and gesture showed him that there was now plenty of room in the Manor seat.

It was a slight thing, but it just gave him

courage. He slipped round into the south aisle and took the place beside her, little guessing how much both for himself and others was to turn on that decision.

In the afternoon some of the party went out bicycling, and as they returned Sir Christopher stopped to speak to old Mallinder, the gatekeeper, and to wish him a happy Christmas.

"We've had a first-rate Christmas, sir," said the old man. "We sat down eight of us to dinner, and all of us enjoyed the fine turkey you give us, sir. Mother, she says, 'We're all here but one,' and looked a bit sad, thinking of our son at the war. So I gets up and I fetches his photograph which he give us in a frame before he went out, and I stands it on the top of the pudding, which made them laugh. 'Now we're all here,' I says." And he chuckled over his little trick.

"I didn't know you had a son out in South Africa," said Sir Christopher.

"Aye, sir, he've been gone more'n two years now, and the poor lad is in hospital—for he were badly wounded in November. But we got a letter from him a week ago, and he says though he've lost a leg, he was better off than many of his mates who'd lost their lives; and, says he, it's been like the old tale I used to tell 'em as children, how 'for want of a horse the man was lost.' He says you never saw such a set of screws as they have to put up with, more fit for the knacker's yard than for use. Some folks have made their pile out o' them horses, says he, but their gains be just made out of the soldiers' lives."

"It's a crying shame, Mallinder, and if the country doesn't insist on a searching inquiry into this scandal it deserves to lose the respect of

all honest men. The old saying has proved itself true again and again throughout this unhappy war. 'The love of money is the root of all evil.'"

"You're right, sir," said the old gate-keeper, "and I only hope by next Christmas, please God, we'll have you, and them as thinks with you, managing the affairs of the nation."

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"Sir Christopher is having a long talk with Mallinder," said Victor, as he stood in the hall watching the blue mist as it gathered among the trees of the park.

"It is very touching to see how the people about here love him," said Irene. "As we came out of church this morning quite a number of the villagers were waiting for the chance of speaking to him. He has such a genial delightful way with them all. I have been

thinking that the homeless feeling of this past year has partly come because I have lost the support of the older generation. Sir Christopher seems to have brought home back to me. I should not like him half as well if he were young."

"That's good hearing," reflected Victor. "She's in love with him without knowing it. I must walk warily."

"The Hopes were old family friends of Sir George's, were they not?" he said.

"I learnt more about it last night than I ever knew before," said Irene. "It seems that my grandfather was in love with Sir Christopher's mother when she was about seventeen. Her parents would not allow the marriage, however; there was some good reason against it—health, I believe. Later on they both married and had very happy lives. But the old romance was

never forgotten, and Sir Christopher had often heard his father and mother refer to it—they both had the greatest respect for my grandfather.”

Victor mused in silence. He wondered whether the self-sacrifice of the grandfather and the mother in the far past would now be rewarded by a happy union between Sir Christopher and Irene, and a sense of the extraordinary way in which the actions of one generation could help or hinder later generations made him sigh as he thought of his own life.

“I hope I shall live to finish Sir Christopher’s picture,” he said. “I should like to do one good stroke of work before the end. Come and look at it. He gave me another sitting to-day, and I think it is not so bad. He’s easier to paint than you are.”

The household was early astir the next morning, for at length the frost had yielded, and the Squire, in prospect of a good day's hunting, was in excellent spirits. But the happiest and most important person in the Manor was Hal, who, with what Sir Christopher called a true "jolly-Bank-holiday" expression, left them no peace until, long before the train was due, they stood waiting on the platform at the station.

It was a red-letter day in the child's life, and his thorough enjoyment of each minute delighted his two companions. Everything pleased him—the journey, the hurried lunch, the crowded streets, the crush to get into the mystic portals of Drury Lane, and, above all, the wonders of the pantomime. How he shouted with laughter at the whimsicalities of Sister Anne and her pet elephant, Doodah, with its rolling eyes

and its delightfully comic prancings! How he revelled in Irene's enjoyment of the cup-and-saucer chorus, and of the three exquisite transformation scenes!

"You were *not* too old to enjoy it, you see," he said triumphantly, when at length it was over and they were driving through the lamp-lit streets to the station.

"No, indeed," said Irene; "and the best part of all was to hear the peals of children's laughter all round that huge theatre. There must have been thousands of children."

Hal was sitting "bodkin" between them in the hansom:

"If it wouldn't be very unfeeling," he said thoughtfully, "I *should* like to see a house on fire as we drive along."

At which fervent desire Sir Christopher could not restrain a laugh.

"I know exactly what you mean," he said, and kept the boy happy with accounts of one or two adventures of the sort which had befallen him long ago.

"I do so hope adventures will come my way," said Hal eagerly. "We always seem to go just jog-trotting on, and nothing ever happens."

"Don't you be in too much of a hurry, lad," said Sir Christopher. "It's the jog-trot days, as you call them, that are generally the happiest."

"I don't mean that this day hasn't been jolly—it's been ripping," said Hal with emphasis. "And I'm awfully obliged to you, sir, and to Irene, for taking me. The funniest of all was when Dan Leno took off Sherlock Holmes, and the kitchen ping-pong, and that jolly part where he kept running up the wooden stairs and Fatima

called, 'What do you see, Sister Anne?' and he cried out, 'The British Army!' Didn't everyone roar at that?"

"To my mind, nothing came up to the last transformation scene," said Irene. "It was a dream of loveliness, and took one straight to fairyland. We must give Dan an extra good supper when we get home, for if it had not been for his introduction to you when you came back from school, I should never have learnt that you wanted to see his great namesake."

Sir Christopher, as he watched the sweet face of the woman he loved, reflected that his obligations to the fox-terrier were still greater, and hope rose high in his heart as he realised how rapidly and with what perfect naturalness Irene had responded to his advances.

CHAPTER IX.

The ruins of time build mansions in Eternity.

WILLIAM BLAKE.

THE wet weather on the Friday proved a gain to Victor Brooklin, who inveigled Sir Christopher into the gallery and worked to such good purpose at his picture that before the end of the day the head was practically finished. He proved an excellent "sitter," and whiled away the time by reading "Rob Roy" to Hal, who had been found groaning over his holiday task, but quickly developed a genuine love for Sir Walter Scott when he could listen to such a reader as the member for Northwall. Irene, as she copied Corot's exquisite bit of woodland scenery, or stitched away at little red shirts for the children in the Concentration Camps, listened to the mel-

low voice of the reader and thought she had seldom enjoyed a day more.

Later on, however, came an interlude that proved a sharp contrast. Milly was in one of her most reckless moods, and flirted so shamelessly with Ambrose Bray that it was difficult not to lose patience with her; while Mrs. Bray, racked with neuralgia and jealousy, passed the time in dressing Guinevere as Fifi in the "Belle of New York," and making her sing the "Gay Parisienne" when the house-party assembled for afternoon-tea.

"What on earth do they expect that child to grow up?" muttered Sir Christopher. "It's a crying shame to spoil the simplicity of a little maid of eight in that fashion."

The arrival of the second post made a diversion, and Henderson, as he handed a big budget to Sir Christopher, said in a low voice,

"If you please, sir, Mallinder is here asking to see you, if possible; he seems to be in great trouble, sir."

"I will speak to him at once," said Sir Christopher, putting down his letters and hastily leaving the room.

He returned in about ten minutes, passing Guinevere with a slight frown as she twirled her parasol, and gave a repetition of her song, and going straight to the place where the Squire and Irene were sitting.

"You'll be sorry to hear that Mallinder at the lodge is in trouble," he said. "News has just come of the death of his son in South Africa. The poor fellow's leg had been amputated and he was doing well when they last heard, but he has died of enteric. Mallinder has not yet told his wife or the little blind girl. He asked whether Miss de St. Croix would

come and tell them, for he says you have been kind in coming to read to the little girl and that no one would break it to his wife as you would."

"I will come at once, if he would like it," said Irene. "Poor things! only a day or two ago they were so happy at the thought that the son would soon be coming home."

She hurried off to put on her walking-things, and the Squire followed Sir Christopher into the hall.

"I notice that we men-folk generally get a woman to break bad news to those who are bereaved," said Sir Christopher. "Will you see Mallinder before he goes?"

But the Squire shrank from this.

"I could do no good," he said. "I don't really know the poor fellow; he has just been the gatekeeper to me and that's all. But give

him my sympathy, Hope. You always know how to reach people in trouble, but I should only blunder over it." Then as an idea struck him, "Of course, if money is needed I would gladly help."

"I don't think there will be any call for that. Tom Mallinder was only four-and-twenty and unmarried; there will be no expenses."

"He actually knows the fellow's Christian name," reflected the Squire, as he watched Sir Christopher joining Irene. "Hope is a strange man; he seems to take heed of such little matters, but he can't grasp the Imperialistic idea."

"It is a very cold night," said Sir Christopher, glancing at Irene to see that she was well wrapped up. "Are you sure you ought to come? I forgot for the moment how unused you are to an English winter."

"Oh, I must come," said Irene. "And, indeed, they say one stores up heat so that the first cold winter seldom affects one."

"Mallinder said he would wait for us outside," said Sir Christopher. "He is sadly broken down, poor man, and was glad to get away into the dark, I fancy. There he is, I see, by the gate."

Irene silently shook hands with the bereaved father. She dared not trust herself to speak, knowing that she must keep calm until she had spoken to the poor mother.

"If Miss de St. Croix goes in and sees your wife, you and I will take a turn out here," said Sir Christopher. "We shall be close by if you need us," he added, opening the little rustic gate for Irene, and looking for a moment into her sweet grave face, which looked whiter than ever in the starlight. Through his mind there floated

the words which have haunted thousands of lovers since Wordsworth's day:

A perfect Woman, nobly planned,
To warn, to comfort and command;
And yet a Spirit still, and bright
With something of angelic light.

Perhaps he never quite guessed what it cost her to walk up the garden path and knock at the lodge-door, knowing what anguish she had to bring to the unconscious mother and sister within.

"Good-evening, Miss," said Mrs. Mallinder, with a beaming face. "Rose will be pleased indeed to see you. To think of you coming out this cold night, too! Come in to the fire-side, Miss, do now."

Irene went into the little kitchen, and took her usual place by the blind girl's side.

"Dear Mrs. Mallinder," she said gently, "I have not come to read to Rose to-night but be-

cause your husband asked me to come and see you. He is talking now to Sir Christopher Hope, trying to bear bravely a trouble that has come—news from Africa.”

“My boy!” cried the poor woman, in a voice of agony that rang through the room. “He’s dead! Yes, I see it in your face. Oh! my God! I thought he was better! But they’ve killed him in their wretched hospitals. If I had been there! If I had been there!”

Irene knelt beside her, saying very little, but with her strong arm about the sobbing woman; and her own tears falling quietly. She knew that only the presence of a reverent and loving sympathy, and the touch of a human being, can reach those in great anguish—that words are but a small matter.

The little blind girl stole down from her chair and sat on the hearthrug, nestling close to

her unseen friend. Irene stopped down to kiss her wet cheek.

"Do you remember what you liked last Sunday, Rose?" she said, "the verses my grandfather was fond of?"

"Will you say them now, Miss Irene?" said the child, wiping her sightless eyes. And for a minute the mother checked her sobs while through the little kitchen sounded the words of Bernard of Cluny, which have comforted so many sad hearts:

There grief is turned to pleasure,
Such pleasure as below
No human voice can utter,
No human heart can know.
And after fleshly scandal,
And after this world's night,
And after storm and whirlwind,
Is calm, and joy, and light.

"Think what it must be for those who for more than two years have been face to face

with the horrors of the war. The greatest contrast one can even imagine—the Peace of God,” she said, half to herself, half to the child. The mother took her hand and kissed it.

“Thank God for you, Miss—I’ll never forget you,” she said brokenly; and Irene, with promises to see them on the following morning, went to rejoin Sir Christopher and the gatekeeper, knowing that the best comfort for the wife would be the comforting of her husband.

Matters did not arrange themselves very easily next day at the Manor. The meet was fixed for eleven o’clock at Michel’s Corner, a common at no great distance, and Irene, on returning from her promised visit to the lodge, encountered Milly and Hal with such stormy signals of anger in their faces that she wondered what could have happened. Lady Newminster’s cheeks were crimson, while Hal looked indignant

and injured and was so clearly desirous to be let alone that Irene did not attempt to speak to him, but watched him mount his pony, Forester, and then went into the hall, where she found Mrs. Bray and Guinevere unexpectedly making their farewells.

"Do you go to-day?" she inquired. "I had no idea you were leaving."

"Yes," said the poor little woman, assuming a gay and jarringly false manner and hoping that the too evident traces of tears would escape the general notice. "We are unexpectedly obliged to go back to town. My husband will follow when he has had his day's hunting."

Ambrose Bray was pacing the hall, flicking his boots with his riding-whip. He looked cross and worried, and there was something in the demeanour of the two that puzzled Irene. Here also, apparently, there had been a recent quarrel.

A babel of loud voices and boisterous laughter rang through the place, contrasting painfully with the sad house she had just left, and she was relieved when the hunting-party at last got off. Then the brougham came round to take Mrs. Bray to Malsbury Station, and Irene prepared to drive Victor to a noted view some five miles off which he was anxious for her to see, and which Sir Christopher, who rode with them on his bicycle, had undertaken to photograph.

"You don't hunt, then?" said Irene.

"No; I used to in my young days, but this hunting of carted stags let loose on purpose to be torn to pieces is more than I can stand," replied the member for Northwall. "It's as unmanly as shooting at tame pigeons."

The day was one of fitful sun and shade, with a soft south wind very welcome after the cold frosty weather of Christmas. Irene enjoyed

the novelty of the undulating country with its bare woods, and began to see that the sombre browns and purples of the wintry landscape and the delicate tracery of the leafless trees against the hazy sky had a beauty of their own as real as the brilliant tropical luxuriance to which she was accustomed.


Victor was in one of his happiest moods, and they talked in that friendly intimate way which was partly the result of their unusual circumstances, partly the outcome of their growing sympathy with each other. They spoke a good deal, moreover, of Sir Christopher; and Irene delighted in learning from her cousin what she had more than once guessed, that the Squire was far less under the influence of John Coldwell and his other speculating friends than had formerly been the case.

Under her cousin's guidance she presently

turned off the main road and drove across the open down, until they came to the edge of the cliff-like ridge that stretched for some distance on either side, overlooking one of the loveliest plains in the neighbourhood. At no great distance were the wooded heights of Rendel Hill with a picturesque old tower in the foreground, and Sir Christopher, leaning his bicycle against a stunted oak-tree, came to the carriage for his camera.

"I shall have to walk up that little knoll to take the photograph; the lights will be wrong from here. Will you come with me and give me your advice?" he said, glancing at Irene.

"I'll take the reins," said Victor, always glad to lend his aid to Sir Christopher's wooing; and with a feeling of satisfaction he watched the two as they walked briskly over the close-cropped turf and climbed the knoll.



Photography—under such circumstances—is apt to be a lengthy proceeding, and presently Victor grew tired of sitting in the carriage, and tying up the pony to a branch of the tree, he sauntered to the extreme edge of the down where it was cut precipitously away into a chalk-pit. He was watching the cloud-effects on the plain below, when suddenly a rushing sound made him glance back.

Tearing across the down came the panting stag, and close on its heels followed the eager hounds—ten couples in all—rapidly gaining on their prey, while after them came the huntsmen, and galloping in front of all was Forester, urged on impatiently by Hal.

The whole pageant seemed to sweep in front of Victor's startled eyes before there was time for thought.

Blind with terror the poor stag bounded

sheer over the edge of the chalk-pit; unable to check their impetuous rush the hounds followed in full cry and were dashed to death below, while it seemed as if the fifty huntsmen following would meet with a similar fate.

Warning shouts and cries rang on all sides, and with might and main Hal tried to pull up his pony. But Forester, mad with excitement, dashed on and would infallibly have followed the stag and the hounds to his doom had not Victor snatched at his bridle as he passed.

The pony swerved aside, kicked, reared, and flung his boy rider with such force that Hal was tossed over the edge of the chalk-pit, and fell with a frightful crash onto a narrow projection some four feet from the top. Had he lost consciousness he must have slipped from his precarious shelf and fallen down the hundred feet which yawned beneath. But,

though feeling as if all his bones were broken, his head was still clear, and he clung with plucky tenacity to a bush beside him. The next moment he saw Victor bending over the cliff, and his cousin, supporting himself by the tough stem of a hawthorn which grew near the edge, gripped fast hold of him. Hal clutched at his rescuer with all his remaining power of will, and only swooned when he had been safely hauled up and laid on a piece of green grass which somehow rose up and down like the waves of the sea.

The photographers, who from the little knoll had witnessed the frightful scene, had just made their way through the eager throng when Hal was laid in safety on the turf. Irene sat on the ground and took the child's head on her knee, while Sir Christopher assumed the general management of everything, giving directions with

a quiet authority which the poor broken-down Squire was incapable of. The mere sight of Hal stretched white and bleeding on the ground utterly unnerved him, and he was thankful to accept Sir Christopher's suggestion that he should ride with his daughter to Malsbury and secure the doctor as quickly as possible.

"Yes," said Milly decidedly. "That will be the best way, Papa, and we shall meet the brougham driving back and can send it here to take Hal to the Manor."

"Why not let me go with you?" said Ambrose Bray, "and the Squire could remain then with his boy."

"No," said Milly, "I prefer to go with my father," and her tone was so cold and decided that the man could only turn away with a muttered curse and join Miss Fitzalban, who had

overheard the conversation and drawn her own conclusions.

"You had better go home to Mrs. Bray and Guinevere," she said, with a saucy smile. "We shall all have to leave the Manor now this trouble has come to them. My father has already decided that we shall go abroad to-night, and be at Monte Carlo by to-morrow evening. I wonder what sort of crossing we shall have."


Irene vaguely heard scraps of the various conversations as she sat tending poor little Hal, while under Sir Christopher's directions a litter was extemporised to bear him to the carriage, which arrived sooner than they had dared to hope. It was not until the injured child had been started on his journey to the Manor that Sir Christopher had time to look round for Victor Brooklin. But a glance at

his face alarmed him, and he remembered with keen anxiety how unfit the invalid was for such a strain as he had undergone in rescuing Hal.

"You are ill—you have hurt yourself?" he said. "Let me drive you home quickly. Or is there anything you ought to have first?"

"No; it is nothing," said Victor. "I get these fits of pain now and then. That fellow over there would bring back your bicycle, and if you won't mind driving I should be grateful."

They set off at a brisk pace over the smooth turf, but when they turned into the road and the shaking became worse, it was clear that Victor was suffering acutely. Sir Christopher saw that there was nothing to be done but to drive carefully and to obey his companion's entreaties not to linger, but he began seriously



to fear that Victor would die before he reached the Manor, so ashy pale was his face, so terribly laboured his panting breath.

At length, however, they were actually driving through the Park, and from the mere relief of the prospect of quiet Victor revived a little. Leaning on Sir Christopher's arm he reached the gallery, and lay propped up among the cushions on the couch drawn close to the fire. Henderson brought restoratives, and when at length the doctor arrived Sir Christopher insisted that he should first see the rescuer.

"It's no use, White," said the dying man. "I have played my last card and won the game. Don't loiter with me, but see to Hal, who I fear is badly hurt."

"You should never have attempted the rescue," said Dr. White, shaking his head. "The strain was bound to be fatal."

"Don't grudge me the only good stroke of work I've ever done," muttered Victor. "What matter a few weeks more or less?"

There was no possibility of saving his life, and all three knew it well. Dr. White, saying that he would look in again after he had seen Hal, hurried away, leaving Sir Christopher in charge.

"I wish you would drag up my easel and let me have another look at your picture," said Victor. "I'm glad I finished the head; anyone can do the rest. It's really a fair likeness."

"An admirable likeness," said Sir Christopher. "'Creases and all,' as poor Hal said yesterday."

"The character lies in the creases," said Victor, "though our sapient photographers too

often smoothe them all away. Now let us look once more at Irene's portrait."

"Why, you have somehow altered it since that first night!" exclaimed Sir Christopher.

"I have something to confess to you," said Victor, speaking rather slowly and with frequent pauses. "You'll not resent it, I hope, from a dying man. From the very first night you loved my cousin."

Sir Christopher gave a little sigh.

"We ordinary mortals are at the mercy of you artists," he said. "You read us like books. It is quite true. But you will remember that the same night she frankly told me I reminded her of her grandfather."

"That merely meant that she once more was in touch with a man of her own set—one worthy of her. Since you were here that look of rest has dawned in her face."

Sir Christopher shook his head.

"You take far too flattering a view of the case, and forget that she is but seven-and-twenty, while I am sixty, and none the fresher for thirty years of political life."

"Nevertheless, I am sure that, though she doesn't yet realise it herself, she cares for you. I blurt out the truth in an audacious way, but the time is short. I owe too much to her not to long for her happiness."

Sir Christopher took the thin cold hand in his and pressed it gratefully.

"You are a good friend to both of us. I shall not forget what you have said."

Irene herself entered while he was speaking, and made anxious inquiries after Victor.

"We'll come to that later on," he said, in so natural a tone that she scarcely realised the truth about him. "What about Hal?"

"I have just left him. Dr. White and Milly are there. They have telegraphed for Sir Matthew Trevor, and by to-morrow I hope all will be well with him—thanks to you."

He looked relieved, but Sir Christopher saw that there must still be grave cause for anxiety about Hal's life.

"Where is the Squire?" he asked.

"I left him in the hall giving orders about the carriages—everyone is leaving by the three-o'clock train," said Irene.

"Farewell to the Hinderers!" said Victor, with a twinkle of merriment in his eyes. "We will speed the parting guests right willingly. Stay with me, Irene, a little, for I want to talk to you. I, too, have a journey before me, and must get ready."

Sir Christopher, with a choking sensation in his throat, left the cousins together and went in search of his friend.

The poor Squire, with a dazed look, was ordering the menservants hither and thither.

"Come and have some food, Brooklin," said Sir Christopher, taking his arm and drawing him towards the dining-room. But the clatter of knives and forks and the buzz of talk daunted the Squire.

"Those chattering magpies would drive me wild," he said.

"Then come to your own den, and I will fetch you something. You must eat, or you'll break down," said Sir Christopher.

"We've wired for Trevor. White thinks he will operate—" the poor father broke off with a stifled sob.

Sir Christopher talked on quietly and cheerfully.

"Yes, so I hear. Trevor, you know, can do almost anything; he's the first man in London."

"God forgive me! I have taken other people's losses easily enough," said the Squire. "But when it comes to one's own son it's different. I never troubled about the poor fellow at the Lodge, and I've talked of a 'good bag' when there were many of the enemy killed in South Africa. Hal will die—it's no more than I deserve."

"Don't lose heart, Brooklin," said Sir Christopher; "I think the boy will be spared. He's a healthy little chap. Now rest, and I'll get you something to eat."

He was glad when he entered the dining-room that the Squire was in peace, for a more pitifully incongruous scene he had never witnessed. Mrs. Brooklin, hiding her aching heart under a defiant gaiety which was ludicrously unreal and out of place, chatted in a rather loud voice to Lord Fitzalban. They were discussing

the merits of various systems at Monte Carlo. And the other guests, having exhausted the subject of the morning's tragedy, were talking composedly of their own affairs, just as though the death-angel were not already hovering over the house.

"Do come and have lunch, Sir Christopher," entreated Mrs. Brooklin. "You have been so kind in helping us all."

"Thank-you; if you'll excuse me," said Sir Christopher, "I'll just take some cold meat and be off once more without ceremony."

And foraging on the sideboard he took what he could lay hands on for the master of the house, and bespoke some strong coffee from Henderson with a view to Irene as well as the Squire.

Thanks to his cheering words and the much needed food, the poor Squire pulled himself

together, and was manfully ready to put Lady Fitzalban into the carriage when the time came, and to bid a quiet dignified farewell to all his guests.

As for Mrs. Brooklin, she stood smiling and smart in the hall, laughing and chatting to the very end. "So kind of you to have come, I am grieved that you should have to hurry off," she kept repeating. "Thank-you! Oh, yes! children are wonderfully elastic. He will soon be all right, I've no doubt. *Bon voyage! au revoir!* Good luck to you at Monte Carlo!"

Ambrose Bray was the last to linger.

"Can I not say good-bye to Lady Newminster?" he asked, with a frown.

"Yes, yes; certainly," said Mrs. Brooklin, thankful to escape. "She is with Hal—I'll send her down."

But as she went up the wide staircase her

false gaiety died out and tears rushed to her eyes.

“Go down, Milly,” she said peremptorily to her daughter. “You are wanted in the hall.”

Milly reluctantly obeyed, and at the foot of the staircase found Ambrose Bray.

“Why did you not come before? Did you not get my note?” he said in a low voice.

“Yes. How dared you write it at such a time?” she said, colouring to the roots of her hair.

“Do you forget what we arranged?” he said angrily.

“No; I shall remember it all my life with shame,” she replied. “It was through that miserable plan that I quarrelled with poor Hal this morning; he had accidentally overheard you talking to Mrs. Bray, and I called him an eavesdropper, because my own guilt made me

fear what he might have heard. Go back to your wife and Guinevere—I never wish to see you again.”

“You mean to say that you give it up?” he said, half angry, half stupefied.

“Yes, that is what I mean,” she said. “When I think how nearly you had dragged me down to ruin I could almost hate you, but I loathe myself more.”

Ambrose Bray, with a slight bow, strode down the hall, rage in his heart, and Milly, white and shivering, made her way to the gallery to see Victor.

“So the Hinderers have gone, bag and baggage,” he said, smiling faintly. “Milly, you look like a ghost! Have some coffee. With Hope and Irene and the doctor in the house all will go well now that the others have cleared out. Cheer up, dear.”

"I shall persuade her to lie down and rest a little," said Irene, "for I hear Sir Christopher's step outside, and shall make you over to him."

"Don't you worry, Milly; it will come all right in the end," he said cheerfully.

"He doesn't know how nearly it went quite wrong," said Lady Newminster, allowing Irene to coax her onto the sofa in her room."

"Have a bed-pillow," said Irene, fetching her one. "There's great comfort in a pillow."

"Yes," sighed the girl, putting down her aching head. Then suddenly looking up, she exclaimed:

"I'm not fit to be in the same room with you, Irene. Had it not been for the accident, I should have been at this very minute in the Dover express with Ambrose Bray."

Briefly she told the whole pitiful story, and Irene listened in silence.

"That's ended," said Lady Newminster. "I shall see no more of him. But there's the future to be faced. What should you do if you were married to a man you hated?"

"Well," said Irene slowly, "it seems to me the best way when we are out of harmony with someone is to look back till we find where our first wrong step was taken."

"That's easily decided," said Milly, with a hard little laugh. "It was when I weakly gave way, and rather than be bothered any more by Mamma promised to love and honour one I disliked."

Irene looked at the troubled eyes in which the soul seemed awakening; then, with a sense that some things are too sacred to watch, turned away.

"I know you think I ought to go back to India," said Milly piteously.

"Never mind what I think, dear; only what your conscience tells you," said Irene. "But surely the best way now is to rest and sleep, so that you may be fit to help with Hal.

"Dear little Hal!" said Milly, with a suppressed sob. "Do you know it gave me a horrid twinge on Christmas Day when we all filed out of church and he had the pluck to stay. I should have liked to stay, only there's that exhortation about—'If any of you be an hinderer of God's Word . . . repent or else come not.' I knew I was hindering, and that I meant to please myself."

"Rest now, darling," said Irene, kissing her, "you are worn out."

CHAPTER X.

Much has been said about love but not too much. I seem to see whole wastes of ecclesiastical and political evil which it has never touched. Faith founded the Church; Hope has sustained it; I cannot help thinking that it is reserved for Love to reform it.—DEAN STANLEY.

LEARNING from a servant outside that Mrs. Brooklin, Dr. White, and a trained nurse just arrived from Malsbury were with Hal, Irene went back once more to the gallery. She was startled to find how much weaker Victor had become. He just smiled at her, but left the speaking to Sir Christopher.

“Dr. White has been in again,” the member for Northwall explained, and his eyes met hers. She understood that the time left was very short, and kneeling down by the dying man softly kissed his cheek.

"You've been my peace-bringer," murmured Victor.

Then after an interval he groped, as if in the dark, for Sir Christopher's hand, and pressed it, turned on his side as though to settle himself to sleep, and in the effort of moving drew his last breath.

The two left the gallery in awed silence, and went to tell the Squire, and to help in the many arrangements that had to be made at once.

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It was not for an hour that Sir Christopher again had speech of Irene. He found her in the music-room, in the deep window-seat of the oriel. Her face was hidden, for her tears were falling fast—not so much from grief, for indeed she could only feel thankful and happy that Victor should have given the last months

of his life for another—but because the hurrying events of the day had exhausted her and brought back the sense of her great loneliness, and the thought of the desolation war was bringing to so many homes.

The man who loved her stood for awhile silently watching her, until the intolerable longing to comfort her overmastered his diffidence.

“Irene,” he said, venturing to stroke the golden-brown hair with a tenderness which thrilled through her. “Can I ever make you understand how I love you? Victor Brooklyn gave me some hope to-day that it might not be impossible. Can you trust yourself to me?”

She looked up into his strong face. Steadfast sincerity and nobleness of purpose were unmistakably seen there; and as her eyes met his her own heart was suddenly revealed to her.

She rose to her feet, and stood silent with drooped head. In the presence of Love every lesser thing faded away.

"I loved you from the first night," said Sir Christopher; "but with very little hope that you could ever think of me save in a grandfatherly way."

"Home came back when you came," she said softly, looking at him with eyes that shone through wet lashes. Then after a pause, and with a little catch in her voice, "I didn't understand why till now. But you see—we belonged."

He folded his arms about her as though to shelter her from a rough world.

They were startled back to the region of trouble by sounds of an arrival, and knew that Sir Matthew Trevor must have come; and there

was little time after that for thought of their own lives.

The Squire was wont to say afterwards that he could never have got through the awful suspense of the time when the great London surgeon was operating on Hal, had it not been for the help of his old schoolfellow. And Irene, sometimes with Mrs. Brooklin, sometimes with Milly, helped them through that terrible waiting when minutes seem age-long.

At length all was over, and the hard-worked doctor was speeding back to London leaving hopeful hearts behind him, while the Squire paced thoughtfully to and fro, wondering what fathers did who could not afford the huge fees rightly given to the first talent in the land. He began to look with less satisfaction at his Chippendale chairs, and all the thousand and one costly luxuries with which he had loved

to surround himself; for visions of hospitals were rising before him, and to save life seemed the thing of all others in which he craved to have a share.

We most of us learn slowly the sacredness of life, and are for ever letting the love of wealth and ease, and pleasure and mere vulgar greed of huge possessions, make us blind to the true standard of manliness once for all given to the world.

A few days later, when 1902 had dawned in darkness and sorrow, the lovers sat once more in the gallery sadly reading the piteous description of the execution of poor Willie Louw in South Africa, under the unjustifiable system of martial law which, far from ending the strife, only intensified its bitterness.

"The awful thought to me is that the war might have been avoided had Englishmen been

true to their best traditions," said Sir Christopher. "When shall we turn our whole strength into the struggle for principle? When shall we leave the false ideal of material greatness, and follow the true ideal of moral greatness? The gospel of bigness is false to the core—as contemptible and vulgar as the plan of the wealthy parvenu who ordered pictures for his great mansion by the yard. Huge private fortunes and huge tracts of territory are too often a source of political danger."

"If you please, sir," said Henderson, "Master Hal is anxious to see you and Miss de St. Croix."

The member for Northwall rose at once to comply with the child's request. Irene never loved him better than when she saw these little signs of his tenderness towards all who suffered, and they went up the stairs hand in hand.

The boy had lost his colour, but otherwise they thought him little altered by all that he had been through, and his light-blue eyes twinkled as cheerfully as ever at sight of them.

"He makes a very good patient," said the nurse, as she nodded brightly to him and left him for a talk with his visitors.

"That's because she's such a jolly good nurse," said Hal. "Just think! she was out in Africa two years ago, and she says often she had Boers and Britons lying in beds close by each other, and that they were quite chummy and shared their tobacco. She says they're as brave as we are. Wouldn't old Beissmann have a fit if he heard her say that?"

"I hope he wouldn't, for it's exactly what we trust they will all do when peace comes," said Sir Christopher. "You and every English man and woman will have to try with might and

main to be just and generous, and to learn to put yourself in other folks' place. John Bull is a sterling fellow, but a little apt to blunder and tread on people's toes when he is in a hurry to force his own way on."

"Wasn't it funny?" said Hal; "do you know that day when Forester threw me and I was holding on to the bush, I kept thinking of how you read to me about Bailie Nicol Jarvie caught on the thorn-bush by the gude braid-claith, and hanging there like 'an auld potato-bogle.' It made me laugh even then."

"Did it seem a long time?"

"Ages. And then when Victor stretched over the edge" (his eyes filled for a minute, but he drove the tears back in boyish fashion) "I thought, Irene, of that Christmas card you painted for me from 'Academy pictures,' and it helped me to grip hard."

He glanced at a little sepia painting near the bed, and Sir Christopher got up to look at it.

There was a background of jagged mountains and in the forefront a precipice with a narrow ledge on which in great peril lay a lost sheep. In the sky hovered an ominous bird of prey, but on the mountain-path above the abyss an Eastern shepherd bent far over the edge and, at great risk to himself, stretched down a strong arm to save his sheep.

Sir Christopher put his hand on the boy's bright hair—there was something almost fatherly in his touch, and with a shudder he remembered how nearly the child had been dashed to pieces.

"We all of us have a chance of being hawks or shepherds," he said. "We may help people up or thrust them down; save their lives or destroy.

But I think your nurse will scold us roundly for talking so much. Would you like me to read you some more about Rob Roy and your friend Bailie Nicol Jarvie?"

"Oh, please do, sir. No one I ever heard reads as well as you. And do you think I might just see Dan Leno?"

"Yes, to be sure," said Irene, "if he doesn't get on the bed, and I will hold him so that he can't do that."

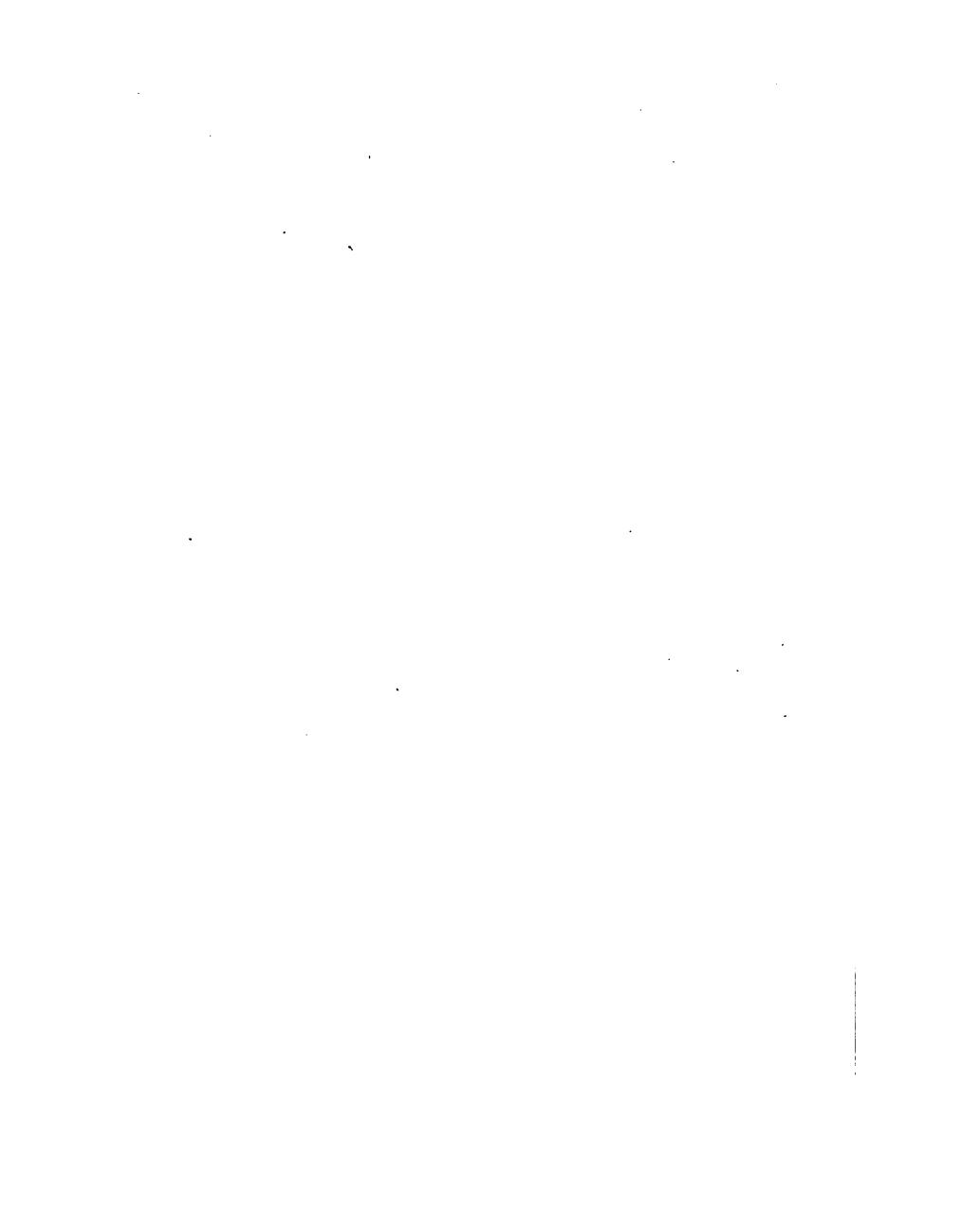
Sir Christopher went down for the copy of "Rob Roy," and Hal turned rather wistfully to Irene.

"It gives a fellow an odd sort of feeling to have been saved. It makes me want awfully to do something for Victor—and now I can't."

"Yes, dear boy, you can," she said. "You can be what he would like you to be—a helper, not a hawk."

And as she sat listening to her lover, while in his mellow voice he read the most delightful novel the Wizard of the North ever wrote, she wondered how she, too, in her wedded life could best help; and glowed with happiness at the thought that in sharing the hopes and ideals and gladdening the home life of the one she so loved and revered, she might serve the country, and have some little part in hastening that kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy which will satisfy every human heart.

THE END.



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